A NEW FACE OF DURGA

Religious and Social Change in SRI LANKA

Nagalingam Shanmugalingam

4
99
JACL-KRC
018799

कलकत्ता BKL

A NEW FACE OF DURGA

Religious and Social Change in Sri Lanka

A NEW FACE OF DURGA

Religious and Social Change in Sri Lanka

Nagalingam Shanmugalingam

KALINGA PUBLICATIONS
DELHI
2002

A NEW FACE OF DURGA:
Religious and Social Change in Sri Lanka

© Nagalingam Shanmugalingam, 2002

ISBN 81-87644-38-9

Rs. 1250.00
$ 100.00
£ 75.00

Published by:
Rajat Sood
KALINGA PUBLICATIONS
10A, Pocket-I, Phase-I,
Mayur Vihar, Delhi-110091
Tel.: 2794060, 2254881
Fax : 91-11-2794060

Lasertypeset at :
FLASH PHOTOCOMPOSERS
37, Suryadeep Building,
Ring Road, Delhi-110052
Tel.: 7249527

Printed at :
SHOBI OFFSET
Kucha Chelan, Daryaganj,
New Delhi-110002

For the living Memories
of my loving father
Shri K. Nagalingam

Contents

List of Tables, Map & Figures *ii*

List of Plates *iii*

Note on transliteration *iv*

Acknowledgement *v*

Chapter 1 : Introduction 1

Chapter 2 : Methodology 7

Chapter 3 : Jaffna: Social Structure and the Present Changes 17

Chapter-4 : Many Faces of Durga 33

Chapter-5 : Temples of Durga 49

Chapter-6 : Modern Literature on Durga and Myth Makers 171

Chapter-7 : Conclusion 185

Plates

List of Table, Map and Figures

TABLES Pages

Chapter 3

Table 3.1 Proportion of women currently married & never married by age groups 20

3.2 Proportion of Men currently married & never married by age groups 21

3.3 University admission to Science based course of study 1970-75 26

Chapter 5

Table 5.1 Population according to religion & sex-Tellippalai 49

5.2 Occupation of the people at Tellippalai 50

5.3 Caste Distribution of Tellippalai 51

5.4 Untial collection of Tellippalai Durga 58

5.5 Percentage of devotees by sex and marital status 74

5.6 Percentage of Persons performing *elumichampala villakku* 74

5.7 Percentage of Persons performing *Thiruvillakku* puja and their purpose, 1981 75

5.8 Number of devotees performed *elumichampala* villakku (1981-1990) 75

5.9 Persons doing normal Archanai-percentage with purposes (1981, 86, 91) 76

5.10 Details of Temple collections-Sai Durga (1985-92) 96

5.11 The Distribution of Devotees & their problems of the sample of 500-Sai-Durga 98

MAP & FIGURES

Chapter2

Map 2.1 Jaffna Peninsula : Main temple & Satellite temples 200

Chapter 5

5.1 Layout fo Tellippalai Durga Temple 201

List of Plates

Plate 2.1 : A Scene of Participant observation : A Healing Mother promising a husband to a female devotee

Plate 2.2 : Researcher as non-participant Interviewer

Plate 4.1 : Traditional role of Durga as Mahisasura Marthani

Plate 4.2 : *Navaratri*, Growing *Navathaniam* - tradition perpetuated to bring fertility, in a devotee's home

Plate 4.3 : Ritual equality amongst the sexes - A wall painting

Plate 5.1 : *Rajakopuram* of Tellippalai Durga facing east

Plate 5.2 : *Eluntharuli* Durga with new satvic from at Tellippalai

Plate 5.3 : Durga Thuranthari Thangammah honoured with Doctorate degree.

Plate 5.4 : Female devotee - the target group of Dr. Thangammah

Plate 5.5 : Act of healing, a badly affected foot

Plate 5.6 : Blessed with a child, *Nerti* fulfilled by offering a palm-tree to healing mother.

Plate 5.7 : Manonmanie on the sword carried by devotees

Plate 5.8 : Jeya, the healing mother

Plate 5.9 : Healing a possessed lady

Plate 5.10 : Personal Annoiting at *Ragukalan* - Colombo part-time Durga temple

Plate 5.11 : Trincomalee Durga - Guardian of peace and harmony

Note on Transliteration

In accordance with conventional practice amongst writers on Hinduism, names and terms are transliterated from sanskrit forms, unless the form in a modern, vernacular Language is plainly required.

Following Fuller (1992), diacritical marks are omitted, and the normal adjustments to the transliteration systems are therefore employed.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Gananath Obeyesekare whose continuous guidance and support made this study possible.

I owe a debt of gratitude ot Professors Abad and Cover from Ateneo de Manila University who laid the foundation necessary for advanced research of this nature.

I am also grateful to Professor P. Balasundarampillai, Vice-chancellor, University of Jaffna and Professor N. Balakrishnan for their continuous encouragement at all stages of this study.

I am deeply indebted to my family members, especially to my Appa, Nagalingam, Amma, Naguleswari, My wife Gowri my Sisters Porfessor Mano Sabaratnam and Dr. Nageswary. All of them were a constant source of encouragement which gave me the courage and strength to complete this task.

It is the Durga devotees from Jaffna and other parts of the country who deserve most credit for this study. They never hesitated to give me very long hours of interviews which helped me immensely to complete this study a successful venture.

Special thanks to my colleague Mr. K. Rajendram (presently a Ph.D. fellow, JNU, New Delhi) for his assistance with the drawing of the maps. I wish to express my sincere and special thanks to Prof. V. Balambal who made this publication a reality.

I must record with gratitude the efficient manner in which the hazardous task of bringing the manuscript to the book form by Rajat Sood, Kalinga Publications, New Delhi.

Dr. N. Shanmugalingam
Head, Dept of Political Science & Sociology
University of Jaffna
Thirunelvely, Jaffna
Sri Lanka.

Kanthan Arul
Ambalavanar Path
Thirunelvely South
Jaffna, Sri Lanka

1

Introduction

Aim and Scope of This Study

Jaffna peninsula which occupies the northern most part of Sri Lanka is a war torn region today. In the same region, a warrior goddess who has been worshipped from ancient times, changed her role most dramatically and gained popularity to play an important role in the rituals and social life of the people.

The aim of this study is to discover, analyse and interpret the recent changes in the religious life of the Hindus of Sri Lanka, particularly Jaffna. Tellippallai Durga is a rare temple, where Durga is the main Deity. Devotees flock, (especially women). They believe that Durga helps devotees in finding suitable partners. It is the belief that seven weekly *pujas* performed to this deity will result in the fulfilment of the wishes of the devotees. It is also significant that this is one of the rarest shrines which is run very efficiently. The income collected from the devotees is being spent on the development of the temple and on social work such as running a home for the female orphans.

According to oral traditions, this temple came into existence about 300 years ago. It remained in a state of neglect until two decades ago when a woman devotee began to take an interest and ultimately dedicated her entire life for the development of this temple.

Tellippalai, the base field site, is also the village where I was born. I have visited this temple twenty years ago when it remained a small one and only devotees afflicted with infectious diseases patronised it. When I returned to my village in the early 80s, the magnificent size and beauty of the temple and the large number of devotees visiting the temple, not only during the annual festival days, but also every Tuesday (it is the day specially allocated for this mother goddess) gave me a *culture shock*. Being a student of Social Anthropology, I was curious to find out the reasons behind this sudden emergence of Durga worship in Jaffna and in general amongst the Hindus.

Goddess Durga, who was generally propitiated in Jaffna, only for three days in a year during the *Navaratri* festival (nine nights), in the month of August - September has achieved extraordinary popularity today. During this festival, the Hindus celebrate

three aspects of Sakti, namely Goddess Durga representing strength and courage, Goddess Lakshmi representing wealth and Goddess Saraswathi representing learning. The tenth and the last day of the festival is *vaalai vettu*, which celebrate the killing of the demon Mahisha, the enemy of gods, by Durga. The killing of the demon is dramatized by the cutting of a banana palm. This enactment portrays the ghora (terrifying) aspect of Durga. This is the form in which the Hindus of Sri Lanka worshipped Durga. To them, the Goddess Durga is the one who would grant them vira (strength). This is the purpose for which, she is worshipped during the first three days of the *Navaratri* festival.

In South Indian traditions too, Durga may be identified with Korravai, who danced amongst the slain in the battle field and the blood stained flesh of the wounded (Cilappathikaram, 1950). Goddesses like Kali and Durga are said to represent the grim aspects of Siva's spouses. The grim form of Durga is housed in the outer courtyard in Siva temples in a small shrine room always facing north, and hence Durga is called *Vadakku Vai Chelvi* (Sami, 1975). It is only here at Tellippalai that the goddess adorns the sanctum sanctrom facing east. In addition the Tellippalai Durga is venerated as Vishnu Durga by the temple management and her devotees.

There are new forms of worship patterns now introduced in this temple. Most of them are non-agamic or Vishnavite in origin. These new religous influences are very well integrated with the existing temple system. The influence of the temple is felt in most parts of the country. More satellite Durga temples have emerged within and outside the peninsula. These temples have peculiar features, for eg: one of this temple is named as Sai Durga Temple. Here, the name of Durga is linked with the name of Sai Baba, a popular religious personality from India. How these changes were introduced and accepted by the firmly established Saivite traditions of Jaffna is one aspect examined in this study.

Another radical change is the acceptance of an unmarried lady one Thangammah Appacuddy, as the President of the management of Tellippalai Durga temple. Jaffna is noted for male dominance and rejection of unmarried ladies taking prominence in any cultural activities or rituals. This aspect is also examined.

In Jaffna, many young female devotees of Durga have recently become possessed by the goddess and they enter into a state of trance, and in this state foretell solutions to the problems of their devotees. These ladies have now established temples of their own in different parts of the peninsula which attract a large number of devotees. These devotees come to find solutions to their problems pertaining to

health, marriage, separation, childlessness and the like. It is the firm belief of the devotees that these healers find solutions to their problems. But the strange thing here is that prior to the popularity of the Durga temple, it was mostly males who customarily became possessed by a god/goddess. This has now changed and women have taken over the function of their male counterparts. The men who become possessed in this manner usually adorn the clothes of a woman, so as to give the appearance of the goddess Kali, particularly when they are in trance. It is important to note here that the possessed individual usually take the form of Kali but never Durga. The grim ["Maruli" (ghost)] form of the goddess is the one that is always taken up by the possessor. However, these ladies who become possessed take the grim and the benevolent form as well. They are spiritual but at the same time are no different from other females. It is difficult to understand how in a region predominantly noted for its agamic traditions, these folk beliefs have become widespread and that too within a very short period of time. These relgious centres will also be studied in depth. In this series of Durga possession, the latest addition is a catholic by birth. Many Durga devotees are now flocking to him and he is apparently said to be solving many of their problems including the psychological stress which the devotees are subjected to. It is very interesting to note that many of his devotees are university students from middle and lower middle class families from Jaffna.

These satellite temples and the possessed personalities have become very popular like the Durga temple at Tellippalai.

From late seventies the number of Durga devotees have increased by leaps and bounds. Even in the traditional temples where the Goddess Durga had a small shrine. Durga worship is observed by a large number of devotees.

It has now spread to Colombo and in addition the emigrants have carried their beliefs to distant places like Canada, Denmark, France, Sweden and other western countries. In fact the wave of Durga worship has recently become popular in Tamil Nadu, India. A number of books on Durga worship are now available in Tamil Nadu.

In this regard, the Author wishes to record his early experience with Durga worship. As a child, he had to hunt for a picture of Durga and when he found one with difficulty he was not allowed by his mother to keep it in the prayer room. His mother had told him that the Goddess Durga is fearsome and as such her picture should not be placed in the altar of one's home. This idea has now become past history and has lost its significance under the present context. The young mothers take pride in

naming their children after the name of the goddess which was unheard prior to 1970s. In addition, commercial advertisements also appear with name of Durga as "Durga Travels", "Durga Cafe" and "Durga Cinema", "Durga Body Builders", "Durga Aaluva" and so on. This goddess is now popular and this popularity according to many of the devotees and religious personalities is the result of looking up to the goddess as Vishnu Durga, and enshrined in the sanctum sanctrom facing east, particularly at Tellippalai.

The recent religious studies on goddess in Jaffna (Kandiah, 1990; Vethanathan, 1989) referred to the popularity of Durga as a result of her power to protect those in fear and danger. In fact, this is her traditional role. But as I stated in the beginning of this chapter, now her role is changed from ghora (terrific) to bhoga, benevolence form and it is believed that she in this form solves the marital needs of the devotees, especially the unmarried women.

In the Social Anthropological perspective, this study relates these religious changes with the social changes taking place in present day Jaffna.

From the inception, Anthropologist have been concerned with religious change, and now they emphasise on the role of symbols in religious systems for their theoretical interpretation of religion. Now, there are valuable studies available in relation to the symbolic dimensions of religious change in South Asia.

Fred, W Clothy in the study on 'Sasta-Aiyanar-Aiyappan- The god as prism of Social History (1982)', reveals that the history and present expression of this divine symbol reflects much of the Socio-Cultural history of South India and its contemporary currents.

In a similar manner, Gough (1970) explains the Social and Religious changes in central Kerala in her study on Palakkara. Regional research studies by Freeman (1975, 1977) offers deep insights into patterns of religious change in Orissa. Obeyesekere (1977) sees the rise of Katragama cult as a response in socio-economic changes in Sri Lanka and also relate the expansion of Huniam cult in the contemporary Buddhist religious spehere, to the historical and religious changes.

Studies on mother goddess and related changes remained insiginificant until the last three decades. After Robert Briffault's encylopedic Sociological work, *The Mothers* (1927), and on psychological perspective, Erich Neumann's classical work, *Great mother* (1963), there was a lull period. Now with the new interest developed from three corners, namely, Anthropology, religious studies and feminist studies, new

insights on this subject are availabe at present. (Preston, 1982, 1983; Christ, 1983. Turner,1983) .

The recent revival of interest in goddess worship can be attributed to three main factors, namely, a new interest in the old matriarchal controversy, goddess symbolism amongst feminist and emergence of a new comparative religion.

The present study centres around the New face of Durga in the context of the cultural life of Jaffna.

What caused the sudden rise of this cult and how a female goddess gained popularity in a male dominated Religio-pantheon system? Why female devotees flock to these shrines? How women managers and women religious specialist roles were accepted in an orthodox male dominated society? How new myths developed? All these questions ultimately led us to see the symbolic change of Durga in relation to the present day Socio-cultural changes in Jaffna, specially in the light of feminist problems of Jaffna.

The situation of Jaffna is unlike the situation in the western world as seen by Carol Christ (1983). In the west, the contemporary feminists intentionally constructing new myths to give women a stronger sense of meaning in the modern world and as a result, they contribute in revitalisation of goddess worship. But it was observed that even after some effort in this line, the feminine symbols remain secondary to more dominant male divine imagery (Preston, 1985).

Anyhow, in Jaffna, without such organised feminist influences, the revitalisation of this goddess was achieved within the cultural context.

Any discussion between religious change and social change raises two basic questions. One, is religion a prime mover in history and the other, is religious change a mere reflection of other changes?

This study examines and reiterates the interplay of social, cultural and the personality forces as stressed by Talcot Parson (1951), by analyzing this new material, the new face of Durga in the socio-cultural context of the present day Jaffna.

References

1. Briffault, Robert & R. Taylor 1927, *The mothers*, Abridged by Gordon (1977), New York.
2. Cilappathikaram 1950, ed. Dr. Saminathaiyer and Kalyanasundaraiyer, Madras: Kabeer Press, PP478.
3. Christ Carol 1983, *The book of the goddess - Past & Present: An introduction to her Religion*. (ed) Carl Olson, New York.
4. Clothy, Fred, W 1982, Sasta - Aiyanar - Iyappan - The god as a prism of Social History, In Fred, W Clothy, ed *Images of Man: Religion and historical Process in South Asia*, New Era, Madras.
5. Freeman, James 1975, Religious changes in a Hindu Pilgrimage centre, *Review of Religious Research*, 16, 124-133.
6. _____, 1977, *Scarcity-an opportunity in an Indian Village*, Menlo Park, California: Cumings.
7. Gough, E. Kathleen 1970, Palakkara: Social and Religious change in central Kerala, In K. Ishwaran ed, *Change and continuty in Indian's Villages*, New York: Columbia University, Press.
8. Kandiah, M. 1990, *Sri Durga Devi Temple*, - Studies on Sri Lanka series - No 1, Sri Satguru publications, Indian book centre, Delhi.
9. Neumann, Erich 1963, *The Great mother: An Analysis of the Arche type*, Princeton.
10. Obeyesekere, Gananath 1977, Social change and the deities, the rise of the Kataragama cult in modern Sri Lanka, *Man, 12, 377-96*.
11. Parson, Talcot 1951, *The Social system*, Glencoe, Illinois.
12. Preston, James J. 1982, *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations*, Chapter Hill, N.C.
13. _____, 1983, Goddess Temples in Orissa: An Anthropological survey, In *Religion in Modern India*, ed, Gin Raj Gupta, Vikas publishers, New Delhi.
14. 1985, *Cult of the Goddess*, Waveland Press, Inc. Prospect Heights, Illinois.
15. Sami, P.L. 1975, *The Worship of Mother Goddess in Tamil* 1975 *Literature*, (in Tamil), NCBH, Madras.
16. Turner, Victor & Edith Turner 1978, *Images and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York.
17. Vethanathan, M. 1989, *Sakti Worship in Jaffna*, (in Tamil) Unpublished M.A. Dissertation. University of Jaffna, Thirunelvely.

2

Methodology

The methodology adopted in collecting data primarily consisted of field work in order to obtain first hand information. In addition, as secondary sources of information, records and documents available in the temples were also used. There is no single formula for the field work observation, it varied according to the research setting. In most cases, it commenced with participant observation and at a particular point questioning was introduced (Plate 2.1 & 2.2). In this manner it was found that the integration of research techniques within a single project opens up enormous opportunities for mutual advantages in each of the three major phases - design, data collection and analysis (Malinowski, 1922; Sieber, 1982; Wax, 1991). This combination of methods give way to collect data from different perspectives too (Lazarsfelf, 1972). This combination, made it possible for me to cross check between various forms of participant observation. These mutual benefits are not merely quantitative, but qualitative as well and as Sieber, (1982) would say, my study too is in the present trend and style of research which is the product of a marriage between survey and field methodology. In fact, many studies in Anthropology and Sociology at present follow this latter methodology (Okley, 1991; Young 1991).

Much of the data was collected using observation method directly from the field. This 'living in experience' methodology is from Malinowski. (1922) to Ratnapala (1979), and it has given many fruitful data for the researcher. Ideally an ethnographer would like to become skilled enough to follow local customs and to be accepted as a functioning member of the group (Carpo, 1987). In order to obtain the local customs associated with cultural rules and to gain a feeling for the way of life, it is necessary to learn the language of the people and this is stressed by many social scientists (Vrry, 1972; Burgess, 1994; Howard 1989; Srinivas, 1979). In this regard, I am fortunate as I am from the same culture, speaking the same language and socialised into the same religious practices. I realized that my prior experiences in the field of study, did not serve as a factor of bias but helped to enrich the data collection. With my theoritical knowledge and the discipline demanded by the methodology adopted, enabled me to overcome any bias of this nature.

As a reflexive perspective I always combined the observations of others with observation of the self, and I realized the importance of this, as I became more and more involved in my field work. Sometimes I was placed in a position, to sing devotional songs or give a discourse by temple authorities. On many occasions I had to oblige, and I felt that this would lead me closer to the field. This however placed me in difficult situations as well, for I had to revisit the same temple to collect the necessary data. Inspite of this, I found this to my advantage, as my familiarity at the temple brought me closer to my field and gave me a better rapport.

It was always easy for me to put myself in the subject of inquiry and to be in empathy as an essential component for research methodology referred to by Max Weber (1964). During my field work, I tried my best to play the required participant role but psychologically I was outside the situation; deliberately involved. However, the temptation to become involved was ever present. It was however, not so difficult to be spontaneous, particularly when the conversation dealt with subjects which I was not studying or had already studied sufficiently. When the discussion turned to topics, that I was studying, I had to be careful to remain aloof and to keep my opinion about specific neighbours to myself, free to observe and retain my neutrality under such occasions.

During research I never experienced my role problems. As Klockers (1977), when I entered the field after explaining the purpose of my participation, gathering information became very easy. Anyhow, it became clear to me that establishing a relationship with the participants very much depended on the nature of the groups. For instance, in the backward areas where the people were poor with little education, entry into the field was an easy task. This was the reason why the participants even came forward to clear their doubts or get explanations for a ritual and the like. To illustrate their cordiality, I would like to refer to just one incident, that happened in one of my study temples. One day around midnight, my wife and I had to to return home in pitch darkness, the devotees requested the priest to bless us and the vehicle for a safe journey home.

On the other hand, when it came to an urban environment which consisted of the educated people, entry into the interior was some times difficult. In fact, some of them even turned away from me, pretending as if they had not seen me. Further the people appeared to have a bias towards me, that I am from the university and this arose from the fear they had about the religious criticism that may arise out of my research. In order to over come this fear, I made it a point to visit the temple

frequently with my family as regular devotees. In order to win their confidence, I accepted, the invitation to participate in singing religious songs and giving discourses. This in fact took away my precious time, but I ignored it, since it brought me and the people very close to each other.

I was however fortunate as being a member from the same village and moreover knowing Thangammah, the President of the Durga temple, the base study temple at Tellippalai, had helped me tremendously to overcome the difficulties which a stranger normally experiences.

Even after this as my subject of study was very personal (some times) I continued to face problems in getting answers from those being interviewed. The questions often related to marriage. They were also reluctant to talk about their *nertis* as they feared would nullify the *nerti*, if they opened up to some one. This made me visit the same temple again and again until they opened up on their own. However, I respected their privacy as Ruebhassen & Brim, (1966) stressed, and in this way, I was able to overcome these difficulties and enter freely into a discussion to get the necessary data.

In a study of this nature, it was always important to inform the participants that their names, addresses will not be divulged and that I would always use psudonyms as suggested by Richards & Richards, (1991).

The present research was initially planned in 1985 to study a single Durga Temple at Tellippalai. The study was aimed to cover the temple social structure, the symbolic system of the goddess, the rituals and the devotees.

This temple in a very short period of a mere two decades, developed as the focal point for thousands of worshippers throughout the country. It was however, realized that there will be serious limitations in drawing up conclusions from data gathered from a single temple. It therefore became necessary to extend the area of study to other Durga temples as well. It is interesting to note here, that, in the last two decades and since I began my field work, Durga temples have spread throughout the country, and temples dedicated to Durga are also found in the western countries to which *Tamils* have emigrated. As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, new temples have been constructed for the Goddess Durga. In certain other larger agamic temples, the shrine which hitherto occupied an insignificant position, received special attention. The shrine rooms were specially decorated with new name boards and special *puja* arrangements were made to attract the devotees. As area for Durga

temples widened, certain individuals became associated with such temples, particularly those in a possessed state and such people are a source of attraction to these temples. As a consequence, although initially I envisaged my study at Tellippalai, subsequently it took me not only throughout the nook and corners of the Peninsula (Map 2.1) but also to other parts of the country as well. As a result of this, the study period was also extended to cover a ten year period (1985-1995). However, I realized that this gave me a better understanding of this cult and in addition to know the variations associated with Durga worship.

Since the field of research is very wide, data collection was confined to judgement sampling technique used by Spindler (1955), Michael Howard (1981) and others. In this methodology, a number of key informants were selected. Age, sex, education, occupation, reputation for reliability and frequency of temple visit were the criteria used, in order to represent all degree of observable socio-economic statuses and all degrees of cultural participation.

While sampling, it is important to consider the specific event or days related to the study (Burgees, 1994). In my study, I had to wait for weeks or months for these events, specially in the case of *Elumichcham pala villakku* (lime lamp ritual) ritual, where there is no time schedule. But on the other hand, it was easy for me to select the scheduled puja days like Tuesdays, Pournamee days for my quantitative surveys.

In addition to the above, indepth studies of selected individuals of each temple of study were also undertaken. The case studies are taken complimentary to sample surveys. Here, the focus sampling technique was used, where an (in depth) study of particular persons was undertaken. Eg; in the case of the *Elumichhampala villakku* rituals, all the participants were observed, but among them, certain individuals were selected.

Further, the divine healers of Durga were also subjected to an indepth study. Following Obeyesekere (1981) while making the case studies, I was not concerned with what really happened, but what affected them and what they believed happened and how they see themselves in relation to the world and in relation to the goddess.

I must record my experience while interviewing these divine healers in big temples, where, I was not given permission by the temple authorities, as they felt that these healers are against agamic traditions. Therefore, it became necessary for me to go to the home environment of those divine healers in order to get the necessary data.

During my field study, I had to adopt techniques to take down notes, and this depended on the environment and circumstances in which the interviewer and the interviewee were. These consists of mental notes, jotting notes and field notes (Lofland, 1971; Bogdum, 1972; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). In particular as Kapferer (1972) suggested, I always maintained a chronological description of events, details of informants and conversations and in the case of documentary work, details in the context of documents.

In many instances, specially that in complete participants and disguised observer, recording is not always feasible on the spot, it had to be postponed until I was alone after the observation was made. It is also important to note here that, constant recording will always interfere with the quality of the observation made. In order to overcome this problem, my family members or my students accompanied me to the field so that on our return we could discuss and take down notes and this collective observation ensures that I would not have missed any detail.

A camera and a mini tape recorder were also used to record the observations wherever necessary. The tape recorder was very useful to record in detail the proceedings between the divine healer and his client. However, the tape recorder was not liked by certain clients and this, in a way hindered me from collecting the necessary data. Therefore it became necessary under such circumstances to adopt other techniques. Furthermore, if a tape recorder is used, transcriptions have to be quickly produced, so that this will enable the researcher to shift the notes, reflect on their experiences and pose questions about their data. However, very often transcription work in my experience was slow and technically difficult. In this regard, I would very much agree with Epstein (1967: 193) who stated that the tape recorder is not the panacea for a field researcher.

The camera gave me varied experiences. Taking photographs in the bigger agamic temples is prohibited and very often I had to obtain special permission for its use. Even when permission is given, restrictions are always imposed on the number of photos to be taken. Even after such permissions, I had bitter experiences and was prevented from taking even a single photograph due to the conflict between the members of the temple management. In one instance, one such member seeing the camera in my hand, shouted at me to remove the name board relating to the prohibition of photographs within the temple. Though disappointed, I managed to observe the rituals for which I had been

waiting for more than a year. On the other hand, in the outer court yard of these bigger temples and in the non - agamic temples, taking photographs helped me gain familiarity with the clients. However, in certain instances, the clients including the priest, the divine healer and the patients began to pose for the camera and this posing culture spoilt the real context. Further in these temples I was even able to go as far as the sanctum sanctorum and take the photographs. In these temples the subjects volunteered and in return I had to give them a copy of the photograph taken. In this instance I was always reminded of my *Guru*, Gananath Obeyesekere, who taught me this trick of winning the confidence of the subjects. He was able to do this with his polaroid camera. This technique of photography helped me to gather details which I was unable to obtain in the field and further looking at a photograph I was able to check details and recollect forgotten memories while preparing my text.

Analysis of data

During the field work and afterwards themes gradually emerged; patterns and priorities imposed themselves upon me. As Becker (1961:31) experienced, in this research too, data collection and analysis of the data were conducted simultaneously.

While analyzing the data, I always remembered, the motto emphasised by Strauss (1987:30) - 'what is the main story here' and this of course helped me to remain in the correct tract.

During the initial stages of my study, particularly in the main temples considered a large number of participants and as many as five hundred were surveyed. In the second stage, the number of samples were reduced in order to obtain more qualitative details. This enabled me to conduct in depth interviews and case studies. At the bigger Durga temple hundreds of devotees came to the temple for specific purposes, the sample was selected for a quantitative studies while in the smaller temples, the number of devotees always remained small and varied in these cases, most of them were selected for case studies.

The quantitative data always helped me to check on the frequency and distribution of phenomena which I studied. In addition, I always integrated the different forms of the qualitative data, case studies and other observations with quantitative data.

The quantitative data I collected was vast. Just like any other quantitative researcher, I was also faced with the problem of how I was going to analyze such bulky

information. This made me feel frustrated at the initial stages. However as I became more deeply involved and buried in analyzing the collected data, frustration soon vanished and I found this very useful, since every detail I had, gave me the necessary information and reinforced the ideas.

Before concluding the description on methodology I would like to add that the field situation was not a conducive one with the present internal situation, and in particular affected my study at times causing me untold mental strain of leaving behind my family at home and I faced 'affective participation' problem as identified by Schwartz (1955). However, once I was in the field, the deep involvement in the rituals taking place made me forget all these at least temporarily. Some times, inspite of transport problems, it became necessary for me to take my family to the field which gave me the motivation to work without any interruption.

Anyhow, as Levi-Strauss says, many anthropologists feel that their research work is not simply a job; it is, with music and mathematics, one of the few true vocations and I am in full agreement with him since I experienced the same in the present study.

In deciding the layout of my text I have divided the contents into seven chapters.

Chapter I deals with the introduction. Here I explain the aim and scope of this study with brief explanation of the phenomena and the theoritical background of this study.

In chapter 2 Methodology, I give in detail the problems I faced and how I overcame in the light of previous Sociological and Anthropological studies.

Chapter 3 considers in detail the socio-economic and cultural context of the study area and its changes, as the title of this chapter indicates, "Jaffna: Social structure and the present changes."

Chapter 4 is titled 'Many faces of Durga' which considers the historical account of Durga and the worshipping pattern associated with Her. This description is obtained from the available literary sources. I compiled together the many varied streams and traditions of Durga cult in this chapter.

Chapter 5 is the main body and soul of this text It deals with the temples of Durga. In order to bring clarity, I have subdivided the chapter into suitable sub headings. At first, data is grouped into the main Durga temple at Tellippalai, and the satellite temples. The latter is further separated into smaller groups to highlight the temples

belonging to the depressed caste groups separately. In addition, a third section considers the Durga temples outside Jaffna Peninsula and outside Sri Lanka.

Chapter 6 deals with the modern literature on the new face of Durga, which I was able to come across only during the last stages of my field study. However, I found this very valuable and informative. In this chapter, I give the translation of the material which I consider will throw more light on the present face of Durga as well as the new rituals associated with Durga worship.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion which explains the significance of this study of examining the religious change in relation to the social change of present day Jaffna, especially in the feminist perspective. This explains the new face of Durga.

References

1. Backer, H.S. B. Geer, & A L Struss 1961, *Boys in white: student culture in Medical School*: Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
2. Bogdan, R 1972, *Participant Observation in Organizational setting*: Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press.
3. Burgess, Robert, G 1994, Approaches to Field Research in *Field Research: A source book and Field Manual*, ed: Robert, G Burgess, Routeledge, London.
4. Carpo, Richaley, H 1987, *Cultural Anthropology understanding Ourselves & Others*, Princetion University Press, New Jersey.
5. Epstein, A.L 1967, The case method in the field of law, in A.L Eptein (ed), *The craft of Social Anthropology*, London: Travistock.
6. Howard, Michael. C 1989, *Contemporary Cultural Anthropology*, University of British Columbia, Scott, Foresman & Company, Illinois.
7. Kapferer, B 1972, *Strategy and Translation in an African Factory*, Manchester: University of Manchester Press.
8. Klockers, C.B 1972, Field ethics for the life history, in R.S Weppner (ed), *Street Ethnography*, Beverly Hills, Calif: sage.
9. Lazarsfeld, P.F 1977, Forward to the English edition; forty years later in M. Jahoda, P.F. Lazarsfeld & H. Zeisel. *Marienthal: The Sociography of an unemployed community*, London; Tavistock.
10. Lofland, J 1971, *Analysing Social Settings*, New York: Wadsworth.
11. Malinowski, B 1922, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
12. Obeysekere, Gananath 1981, *Medusa's Hair*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
13. Okey, J 1991, *The enthnographic method applied to rural transport, the elderly and planning*; Report to the Economic and Social Research Council.
14. Ratnapala, Nandasena 1979, *The beggers in Sri Lanka*, Colombo.
15. Richards, L & T. Richard 1991, The Transformation of qualitative method: Computational paradigms and research processes, in N.G. Fielding & R.M Lee (eds), *Using Computers in Qualitative Research*, London; sage.
16. Ruebhaussen, M.O & Oliver G. Brim 1966, Privacy and Behavioural Research: *American Psychologist* 21:423-444.
17. Schatzman, L & A. Strauss-1973, *Field Research: Strategies for a National Sociology*, Englewood Clifts, N.J Prentice Hall.
18. Schwartz, M.S & Schwartz, C 1955, Problems in Participant Observation, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol: 6, No.4.
19. Sieber, S.D 1982, The integration of field work and survey methods in R.G. Burgess (ed),

Field Research: *A source book and field manual*, London: Allen & Unwin.

20. Spindler, G.D 1955, *Socio Cultural and Psychological Processes in Menomini Acculturation*, University of California Publications in Culture & Society, Vol:5.
21. Srinivas, M.N, A.M Shah & E.A. Ramaswamy (eds) 1979, *The field worker and the field: Problems and Challenges in Sociological Investigation*, Delhi: OUP.
22. Strauss, A.L 1987, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
23. Urry, J 1972, Notes and queries on Anthropology and the development of field methods in British Anthropology, 1820-1920, *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Grate Britain and Ireland.*
24.. Wax, R.H 1971, *Doing field work: Warnings and Advice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
25. Weber, Max 1964, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. By A.M Henderson and Talcott Parsons, New York: Free Press.
26. Young, M 1991, *An Inside Job*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3

Jaffna: Social Structure and The Present Changes

Jaffna Peninsula is predominantly inhabited by Tamil speaking Hindus. As far as this peninsula is concerned, very little Anthropological or Sociological studies have been undertaken until very recently (Bank, 1960; Thambiah 1973; David, 1973, 1975, 1980; Pfaffenberger, 1982; Perinpanayagam, 1982). Historical and Archeological studies of the origin and character of the Tamil settlements in Jaffna have also become available recently (Indrapala, 1983; Ragupathy, 1983; Sittampalam 1983; Pushparatnam, 1994). Although there is evidence to show that the settlements in Jaffna dates back from megalithic times, little is known about the social history of Tamils and their social organization.

The people in Jaffna have developed distinctive life styles and culture and this is attributed to the geographical position of the Jaffna peninsula and its physical features (Raghavan, n.d) The closeness of the peninsula with India brought waves of migration from the main land into the peninsula from time to time and this is reflected in the social life of the people. Inspite of this, Jaffna developed its own tradition. Perhaps this is a direct result of its peninsula nature as suggested by Ohno and others (1985: 184) and Jaffna also inspite of the Aryan influence has retained its individuality which is mostly of the Dravidian elements.

We have little documentary evidence about this migrant population. However the available evidence the *Thesawalamai* or the Code of the Customary Laws of Jaffna stands conspicuous and show distinctively the life style of the people. It is a vital document relating to the social history of the Ceylon Tamil. In it, are embodied centuries of development of their customs under the Tamil Kingdom of Jaffna (Arasaratnam (1964; 109) *Thesawalamai* deals with the right of property and inheritance of marriage of the Tamils who live in the peninsula and was codified by the Dutch in the eighteen century. These laws continue to dominate the life and Culture of Jaffna Society. One of the major factors that differentiate Jaffna Tamil Society, is the institution, the *Kudimakkal* system, which has a control over the lives of the people. This regulates the interrelation of the higher and lower groups functioning in a stratified social structure. The existence of this system, prior to the

Thesawalamai Code of 1706 is not evident (Muthukrishna, 1862; XXVI). The *kudimakkal* system may be considered as the growth of the Tamil Society during the ancient and medieval era and this contributed to the stability of the social life of Jaffna. This is comparable to the structure of the Kandyan Kingdom as described by Raghavan (n.d: 170).

The caste system amongst the Tamils of Sri Lanka is based on the Dravidian caste system of South India, but with some peculiarities (Arasaratnam, 1964 Pfaffenberger, 1982). The caste system is occupational and the agricultural caste occupies the apex of the system. The Brahmins who play a major role in the social structure in India is reduced to an insignificant group in Sri Lanka and here they are called over to carry out religious rituals in temples managed by the *Vellalar*. Their number being small, they came to be dependant on the *Vellalar* who outnumbered them. The political and economic ascending of the *Vellalar* has been extended into the modern democratic system as well. The social authority was no doubt in the hands of the *Vellalar*. However according to the *Varna* theory, they too belong to the *soothra* caste, the one which occupies the last step in *Varna* hierarchy.

The *Vellalar* were further divided into *sat soothra* and *asat-soothra* (Arumuga Navalar, 1954), and also another category, the *panchamar* was introduced (Sivathamby, 1994). Kenneth David (1977) identified two caste patterns, the bounded and the unbounded groups, as *adimai* and *Kudimai*. Those who directly come under the *Vellalar* domination formed the bounded caste and those who did not come directy under *Vellalar* domination formed the unbounded caste.

The caste structure amongst the Tamils remains unaltered for centuries inspite of external influences. The caste system of the Sinhalese; on the other hand due to the recent economic and social changes, have been subjected to modifications. The relation of the old framework of caste has made the Tamil Society a conservative one. This structure is highly maintained in the Peninsula than in the main land where the Tamils live (Arasaratnam, 1964: 117). However, these traditional institutions are slowly, but steadily giving place to more liberal ideas. With changes in the social life of people, the stratification of the caste system shows signs of breaking up. Since the caste system in Jaffna is based on occupation, the social mobility of the low caste groups depend on giving up their traditional occupations. Two of the dynamic factors contributing to social changes are free education introduced by the state in 1945 with its

accompanied occupational opportunities and economic independence. These two factors together brought about a sense of awareness for social consciousness with equal rights for all. The recent foreign employment opportunties have made possible for the depressed caste groups to accumulate wealth and to invest on land for dwelling and agricultural purposes.

Family as a Basic Unit

The family continues to be the basic unit in the social structure of Jaffna. The position of the family as a unit was respected and considered important, the household or family was identified in association collectively rather than on the responsible individuals who formed part of it (Metthananda, 1990). Marriage in classical Tamil is called *vivakam*, from the Sanskrit *vivaka*, but this term is used only amongst the high caste Tamils, but the word *kalyanam* implying conviviality is used by the lower caste groups (Ragavan, 1972). Bonds of kinship amongst Tamils were close and intimate as marriages were within members of the same caste, and this perhaps gave a social stability as described by Metthananda (1990).

Marriage Relations

The only marriageable relations in Jaffna are cross cousins, children of a brother and sister while marriage is prohibited between first cousins. This prohibition extends to alliance between any relations except cross cousins. Thus, one cannot marry his niece, though among non-Brahmins of South India such an alliance is traditional. Marriage between cross cousins is customary and obligatory. The marriage between children of two brothers and sisters is however not illegal under the marriage registration ordinance of Sri Lanka. This social taboo in the Jaffna society continues to be strong (Thambiah, 1951:18). However, marriage pattern of the Tamils is now changing as a result of western education and other changes. This will be dealt in the latter part of this chapter.

Marriageable Age

In the ancient Tamil society according to *Irayanar Kalaviyal Urai*, a garmatical work which belongs to the *Cangam* period refers to the age of a young man and a woman who indulge in secret love as 16 and 12 respectively. Baldaeus (1958-9) also refers to early marriage in Jaffna, but according to this the age of the partners

is still younger. Early marriages are encouraged, because a maiden without her good portion is considered as a bad commodity. In Tamil society, those who neglect or delay in propagating their own kind are scorned in public. This may be the reason for parents to arrange early marriages for their daughters when they are about 10-12 years old and hence it is common to see female children at the age of 13 or 14 as mothers. (Baldaeus, 1958-9).

It is still very common for parents to be anxious and concerned to find a partner for their children at the appropriate age. However, this is not that easy for reasons like dowry which will be dealt with later. The age at which young boys and girls getting married in Sri Lanka is steadily on the increase and the following data substantiates this.

Table 3.1

Proportion of Women currently married and never married by age groups.

Age of women	1946		1953		1963		1971	
	currently married	never married	currently married	never married	currently married	never married	currently married	never married
15-19	23.9	75.3	23.7	75.7	14.8	85.0	10.6	89.4
20-24	68.4	29.4	65.7	32.5	57.6	41.3	45.9	53.1
25-29	84.4	11.8	84.4	12.8	81.0	17.1	73.5	24.6
30-34	87.1	6.6	87.8	7.5	88.6	8.3	85.9	10.9
35-39	85.5	4.3	86.5	5.4	89.8	4.8	89.3	5.6
40-44	78.4	4.1	80.7	5.0	86.1	4.3	87.8	4.3
45-49	71.4	3.4	73.8	4.4	81.6	3.9	84.9	3.6

Source: Census reports - 1946, 1953, 1963 and 1971.

Table, 3.1 and 3.2 indicate that marriageable age continues to be prolonged and if there is no economical development, it may reach a stage when more and more older women will remain unmarried or get married very late.

Marriage Arrangements

Traditionally, in the Tamil society marriages were always arranged by the parents and the young couple getting married had no choice of their own. A woman or man

for that matter could not marry in direct opposition to his or her parents' wishes. Daughters whatever may be their age, are bound to marry in accordance with the wishes of their parents. They have no power to contract marriage of their own accord in disobedience to the parents' wish (Armour, 1961: 20).

Table 3.2

Proportion of men currently married and never married by age groups.

Age of men	1946		1953		1963		1971	
	currently married	never married	currently married	never married	currently married	never married	currently married	never married
15-19	1.2	98.7	0.9	98.7	0.9	99.0	0.6	99.4
20-24	18.9	80.5	15.8	83.5	15.0	84.7	13.6	86.3
25-29	55.1	43.4	53.3	45.4	49.0	50.5	46.9	52.6
30-34	75.3	22.4	76.4	21.7	72.8	26.1	73.7	25.5
35-39	84.3	12.5	85.4	11.8	85.2	13.1	84.9	13.7
40-44	85.9	9.3	87.2	8.7	87.0	10.4	88.7	9.4
45-49	86.0	7.6	86.5	7.6	88.6	7.2	89.3	7.9

Source: Census reports - 1946, 1953, 1963 and 1971.

Infact, Percival quite rightly observed as far back in the early 19th century that marriages were fixed when the partners were still minors. As a consequence; it is said that very often, the parents were the key players and the couple to be married were only passive participants and very often young in age during ancient days (Baldaeus 1959: 124). The arranged marriages were intra-caste and within the closed family circle as referred to earlier and this is a crucial factor to retain the caste system and the family property. According to Adle Ann (1994: 10) the arranged marriage system was particularly conducive for perpetuating property relations and consolidating the social power within the caste system.

The aspirations and expectations of parents concerning the marriage of their daughters are ever on the increase and this is the direct result of suitable male partners becoming a rare commodity. As a consequence, individual brokers, press advertisements and information through internet and reputed marriage brokers are

becoming the mechanism for finding a suitable partner. Although the mode of arranging a partner has changed, the basic requirements for marriage has not changed in any way.

The followings are examples from the weekend papers in Tamil & English. 10.12.1996: Virakesari Weekly - Advertisements.

1. Jaffna Hindu high caste Vellala parents look for their 31 years old 5ft. 2 inch. tall, Diploma in Pharmacy, beautiful daughter; a bridegroom, who is a teatotaller, with good manners, good moral character and holding a permanent job. Suitable dowry a house in Colombo and jewels will be given. In the first correspondance itself, please include all particulars and a copy of the horoscope.

   A 796, C/O Virakesari, P.O. Box 160, Colombo.

2. Jaffna Hindu parents look for a bride for their son who is 27 years old and a Civil Engineer in Australia with mars affliction. The girl should be between the age of 20-23, beautiful, educated with a good Tamil culture. A girl with credit pass in the O/L is preferred. Communicate with family particulars and horoscope.

   G-788, 90 Virakesari P.O. Box 160, Colombo.

Inspite of the arranged marriages, a few love marriages do occur, and these partners get married normaly against the wishes of the parents and therefore do not get a dowry. As a result of these socio-economic sanctions, these love mariages face problems.

It should be noted that love marriages were rare because the young girls after the age of puberty were bared from leaving their homes except to go to the well or answer the call of nature. Infact they were never allowed to go to temple or even to school. This has been observed in studies conducted in Jaffna (Skounberg, 1982). However, in the modern times with the introduction of free education and a desire for education by both sexes the picture is changing. A good portion of the schools in Jaffna are sex based but the tutories are places where both sexes meet and this has contributed in many ways to deviate at least in some ways from the traditional marriage system (Holmes, 1980).

The temple scenery has also changed. Young female children coming to the temple are no more bared and in fact it has become a culturally accepted fact for girls to attend temple functions. The present study, infact examines the relationship between temple rituals and the participants namely the young females.

Astrology

A pre-requisite for arranged marriages is the matching of the horoscopes of the potential partners. (Perinpanayagam, 1982). The two horoscopes are studied in detail by the astrologer and he particularly looks for planetary matching for eg, mars affliction in one of the charts will have to be matched with another one of similar affliction. The strength of the marriage relationship is valued only by the degree of matching between the horoscope of the two persons concerned. The role of the astrologer is important even at present. In matching the charts as above, the wishes of the boy and the girl concerned becomes insignificant and in most cases is not considered at all. The other affliction though not considered to be serious, will delay in finding appropriate partners. The present study examines such afflictions in detail.

It is to be noted here that affliction by mars is generally not conducive to the consummation of relationship, and its presence in certain specific house of the chart is considered to be bad indeed. Mars in the seventh house is considered to be very unlucky and any parent will be hesitant to give their children in marriage to persons with such afflictions. Mars ascended in house eight is slightly mild in its effects (Perinpanayagam, 1982:4). People with such afflictions can marry only those with similar afflictions.

From this, one can see that the horoscope, like caste, class etc. plays an important role in matchmaking, but these become secondary and dowry, cash and property given to the groom by the father of the bride, plays the dominant role and decides whether a marriage will take place or not. Wealth had played a major role in deciding marriages in Jaffna for a very long time, and today it has developed to such a magnitude, that it has turned out to be the curse of the society, denying wedded life to many young girls. The demand for a dowry and the amount demanded is ever on the increase, which most parents find it difficult to comply with. Dowry in the form of cash, immovable property, jewels is demanded in fixed amounts, but out of proportion to the job, the prospective groom holds. In the past two decades, the dowry system has emerged as an acute social problem and it has created an irreconcievable condition between social expectations and material reality. It has polluted and corrupted the social sancity of marriage. It has reduced the human relationship between woman and man into a calcuated contract. The practice of the dowry system has brought a vast number of families to the brink of poverty and despair. Most importantly, this practice has deprived family life for many. (Ann 1995: 30).

At present the dowry system has intensified problems involved in hunting a groom due to several factors. Eligible young men are in short supply, they have either left the country for employment or have joined the militant movement of the Youths. The demand made by dowry seekers has increased. The other side of this sad picture is the flow of money into the Peninsula. With foreign employment any amount of cash or property is offered to find suitable partners. As the eligible young men become more and more rarer, particularly as a consequence of the internal war situation, the search for a groom has turned out to be a hazardous task and parents of the groom are only concerned with hoarding wealth. They are also anxious that the agreed dowry be given as far as possible in the form of cash and not property.

Status of Women

The status of women in the patriarchal society remained very low. They were denied education. Infact when the first American School for girls was established in Jaffna, it became necessary to attract each student by offering money towards dowry amounting to 5-6 rupees per year of their study and this was continued as long as she remained at school (Tennent 1986: 156). When franchise for women was granted in Sri Lanka, protests were raised against this and the most noteworthy opponent of this was Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan who argued that it would lead to the destruction of domestic peace, purity and harmony that prevailed in the household (Methananda, 1990). Inspite of this, the growth of free education gave at least a small amount of equal opportunities for women to become more aware of the world around them. However, when it came to family and marriage they were reduced to a secondary level and continued to remain as dependants on their family namely the father and the brother. In the cultural context of Jaffna, man is seen as the point of reverence in a woman's life. The social status of the husband defines and determines the social status of the wife (Ann 1995:42). Thus we can see that there is no scop for social mobility for a female child. The social factors like education, employment, income etc. do not provide for social mobility, and the factor that actually determines a woman's mobility is the value of the dowry she receives. The few educated women break away from the social barriers and work for their emancipation, but a majority of them without speadheading for their liberation are caught up in the oppression of women which forms the normal pattern (Jayaweera, 1979). However, in Jaffna one can witness a changing scenario especially in the last ten years where some very young women have become members of the militant groups. Dowry in Jaffna was prohibited, since 1995, and it was hoped that it would ease the tension that affected the women.

Education and Employment

Jaffna, geographically is a barren land except for the steady supply of underground water remains hostile for human habitation. Under these conditions, people had no choice but to pay a premium on education. English education provided for better employment opportunities in the government or non-government sector under the colonial rule and they made the best of it.

The supply of Tamil clerks to the administrative service in 1921 was out of proportion to the population size. The interest shown for education, gave them the opportunity to receive good employment especially those which required a good knowledge of the English Language, Mathematics and Science within the government and private sector. Employment became the ultimate goal of education and without it, the economic survival of the Tamils would be doomed, a good number of Tamils, never hesitated to sacrifice their comforts for their children's education (Nithiyananthan 1987: 113). However, the changes introduced in and after 1950 came as a threat to the prestigious position that educated youth enjoyed under the colonial rule. The Future of the Tamils became vulnerable and the unlimited openings they had hitherto enjoyed in the public service and the private sector came to be almost denied to them. The passing of the Sinhala only act in 1956 further weakened them (Nithiyanthan 1987:115). Newton Gunasinghe (1984:15) expressed the same views, " Tamils having played little or no part in the formation of governments since 1956 could not possibly hope to reap any benefits from the newly gained independence and political changes made in the country."

Consequently, the number of Tamils in middle and lower level occupations fell drastically during the 1960s and 70s. Tamil representation in public service at all levels was low in proportion to their population size. This heavily reduced the economic status of the Tamils and a severe unemployment problem developed amongst the Tamils. Research studies and statistical data also show that unemployment almost doubled between 1960-1973 (Nithiyananthan, 1987; Karan, 1989; Schwarz, 1975). It is in fact true that the country at this juncture, faced a severe unemployment problem and therefore the problems of the Tamils have to be examined in the light of economic conditions faced by the country as a whole during this period. The growth rate of the economy was retarded from (8.5%) in 1968 to 4.2% in 1970. In 1971 it fell as low as 0.9% (Central Bank report, 1974:03). This decline in the economy of the country affected the Tamil community very much as focused by Urmila Paddnis (1979: 336).

"It is true that during the decade 1963-73 the percapita income of the Sri Lankan Tamils decreased by 28% while that of the low country Sinhalese and Kandyan Sinhalese increased by 18% and 24% respectively".

The government educational policy on University admission with its accompanied standardization on ethnic basis further dwindled the employment opportunities and as a consequence the number entering the university declined percentage wise and in absolute terms. (C.R. de Silva, 1978).

Table 3.3

University admissions to Science - based course of study 1970-1975

Year	Total No entered	Tamils		Sinhalese	
		No	%	No	%
1969/70	792	315	39.8	457	57.7
1970/71	955	337	35.3	579	60.6
1971/72	1069	389	33.6	680	63.6
1973	1177	347	29.5	793	67.4
1974	1403	294	20.9	1058	75.4
1975	1411	268	19.0	1101	78.0

Source: C.R. de Silva, 1978

As a result several 100s of A/L qualified youth became unemployed and they formed a major component of the revolted youth of Jaffna (Dissanayake 1983: 29). This situation is parallel to the JVP rise in the South (Keerawala 1980:55) also against the government in power.

Although education came to be denied to the Tamils, the restrictions on the import of agricultural products like chillies, potatoes, onions, grapes, etc, encouraged the farmers to take to agriculture bringing dramatic changes particularly in the villages. About the same time more people began to seek employment outside the country and this consequently resulted in the development of a new elite among the Tamils. The unsettled conditions in the country forced many professionally qualified Tamils to emigrate and is continued to this day. The agricultural policies of the then government encouraged the Jaffna man to take to agriculture, and this in a way, was able to reduce the impact on the unemployment problem resulting from educational denial. But the liberal trade policies of the government introduced in 1977, again brought the Jaffna man into heavy economic stresses. These factors resulted in a resentment amongst the youths and the dependency on foreign money earned by the family

members became an important source of income. It became necessary for foreign employment seekers to hang around embassies and foreign employment bureaus to achieve this. However, this had to be accomplished only after heavy spending.

Religion

Religion is a strong bond of union amongst the different groups of Jaffna. Hindus form the majority, in addition Christians, Muslims and a few scattered Buddhists. The Hindus worship Siva and the worship of Vishnu is secondary to Siva and unlike in India, Hindusim practiced in Jaffna is known as *Saivism* (Suseenthirarajah 1979: 175). Throughout Jaffna Peninsula, the landscape is dotted with Hindu shrines. The Hindu temples fall into two categories; the larger of them have Brahmin priests to perform the rituals and, the smaller non-agamic temple where the rituals are generally performed by a *Poosari*. *Saivism* has imposed a sort of homogeneity to the traditional Tamil society, and it has, along with the Tamil language inspired close and continuous contacts between the Hindus of Sri Lanka and South India (Pathmanathan 1979: 150). The Hindu tradition was revived in Sri Lanka during the nineteenth century after a long period of suppression under colonial rule. This revival infact took place as a consequence of the influence of western values and ideas over the traditional values of the Tamils. The revival was largely the work of Arumuga Navalar, who was considered the champion reformer of the Hindus. This revival had two faces, one to accept the western ideals into the secular affairs and the other to retain the traditional values as far as religion is concerned. From the time of Navalar onwards, a strong tradition of *Saivaism* and the philosophical doctrine of *Saiva Sithantha* came to dominate the religious sphere of the Jaffna Society. In the Agamic temples as referred to earlier, the ownership of the temple is not in the hands of the Brahmins who perform the rituals, but in the hands of the *Vellalar* (Banks 1960:67) and therefore everywhere the *Vellalar* perform a conspicuous role as temple patron providing funds for the construction of temples, for the maintenance of priests, festival expenses and for routine operations (Pfaffenberger: 1982). The Vellalar or the community of agriculturists who dominated traditional Hindu society endorsed orthodox Hindu value which served their interests (Pathmanathan, 1979). The values of such a society contrasted with the modern ideal of social equality. The Hindu social organization based on a hierarchical division of occupational groupings or castes, is strongly rooted in the Peninsula. Casteism and untouchability came to be closely knit within the religion and society. This was so strong, that the so called untouchables were denied temple entry, until

as late as 1960s. The influence of marxists ideology brought a new dimension by inspiring the depressed sections of the Hindu society. Several forms of protest were raised against the civil disabilities act which was aimed to remove the inequalities imposed on them. In addition, another development which began to influence the thinking of the upper caste Hindus on matters of social behavior was the emergence of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka since the fifties (Pathmanathan 1979: 119). Even now in villages where traditional values persist, caste prejudices continue but with new dimensions (Shanmugalingam, 1988). The non-agamic temple owned chiefly by the low caste groups are seen to be changing the desire towards sanskritization, and this reflects their aspiration for social mobility. However, that such a mobility has not been achieved is seen from the recent study of the Annamar cult (Shanmugalingam, 1995).

From the Tamil point of view there is no distinction at all between *Brahmanical-Sanskritic* or transcendental rituals, and low caste, non-sanskritic or pragmatic rituals. They are all part of a single ritual design. The purpose of this is to create the very foundation of social order and a dignified life (Mandelbaum, 1966; Pfaffenberger, 1980).

The religious practices are very strong in Jaffna irrespective of one's social status and with a strong belief in astrology (Perinpanayagam, 1982). The religious beliefs in Jaffna continues to be strong in spite of modern ideas spreading throughout the world and there are many factors accounting for this.

The children observe fasting and this is considered to be important, and on a fasting day, attend the temple after physical purification, perform their worship in conformity with the rules prescribed for such occasions. They learn these rules from their parents and study the mode of worship from their text books. They engage in special prayers or undertake vows in relation to the passing of examinations, promotions, curing of personal or family illness (Suseenthirarajah, 1979: 173). Same author holds that the religious practices are maintained without changes, but this is not so, infact this is the period during which religious practices came to be intensified and infact with the introduction of many more new practices which will be examined in detail in this study.

Many who researched into Hindusim and Hindu temples have identified a large number of *Saivite* temples, but there is no indication of a temple to the Goddess Durga. The main shrines are attributed to Siva and Sivan temples are found at Munneswaram, Thirukeetheswaram, Thirukoneswaram and Naguleswaram, and the

temples dedicated to Murugan are found in Maviddapuram, Nallur, Thondamanaru, Sittandy, Mandur and the popular temples dedicated to goddesses are namely the Nagapooshani Amman temple in Nainativu, Veeramakali Amman temple in Nallur and Panrithalaichchi Amman temple at Chavakachceri. Even the publication by cultural ministries refer to agamic temples and there is no reference to any non-agamic temples. It is important to record that until the mid 1970s, no reference is available relating to any Durga temple, which is the main theme of this study. However, in recent times there are a number of references to Durga temple, and many books have also been published in Tamil as well as in English particularly on the subject of Durga worship.

References

1. Ann, Adele 1994, *Unbroken chains-Explorations into the Jaffna dowry system*, Malathi Press, Vannarpannai, Jaffna.
2. Armour, John 1961, *Grammar of Kandyan law*, ed. J M Perera, Colombo.
3. Arumuga Navalar 1954, *Navalar Pirapanta Tiratu* ed. S Kailasapillai, Jaffna: Saiva Paripaana sabai.
4. Arasaratnam, S 1964, *Ceylon*, Engleweed clifts, New Jersey: Prenstance Hall.
5. Baldaeus, P 1958, A true and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon. 1959, A new and unabridged Translation in to English by Pieter Brohier. *The Ceylon Historical journal. Vol. VIII, July* 1958 to April 1959 Nos. 1-4.
6. Bank, Michael 1960, Caste in Jaffna. In *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and North-West Pakistan*, ed: E R Leach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
7. Central Bank of Ceylon 1974, *Annual report*-1974, Central Bank of Ceylon Colombo.
8. *Censes Reports* 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971, Dept. of Censes, Colombo.
9. David, K A 1977, Hierarchy and Equivalance in Jaffna, North Ceylon: Normative codes as mediater. *The new wind: Changing Identities in South Asia* (ed) K David, Mouton Publishers, The Hague.
10. Dissanayaka, T D S H 1983, *The Agoy of Sri Lankan*, Swastika (Private Ltd). Colombo.
11. Gunasinghe, Newton 1984, The Open Economy and Ethnic Conflict, *Lanka Guardian*, Vol. No 18 Jan. 15, Colombo.
12. Holms, W R 1980, *Jaffna* (Sri Lanka), Christian Institute for the study of Religion and Society of Jaffna College, Jaffna.
13. Indrapala, K (ed) 1989, *Jaffna*, Department of Information, Colombo.
14. Jayaweera, Swarna 1979, Women and Education in *Status of women in Sri Lanka*, University of Colombo.
15. Karan, James K 1989, The Tamil National Struggle, in the *Tamil National Question and the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord*, ed N Seevaratnam, Konark Publishing Pvt. Ltd. Delhi.
16. Keerawela G B 1980, The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the 1971 uprising, *Social Science Review, No. 2, Jan.* Colombo.
17. Nithiyanandan, V 1987, An analysis of Economic factor behind the origin and Development of Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka, In *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, ed. Charles Abeysekera & Newton Gunasinghe, Social Scientists Association, Sri Lanka.
18. Mandelbaum, D G 1966, Transendental and Pragmatic Aspects of Religion, *American Anthropologist* 68: 1174-91.

19. Metthananda, Tilaka 1990, Women in Sri Lanka: Tradition & change in *Women at the cross roads*, ed. Srima KiriBamune & Vidyamali Samarasinghe, ICES, Colombo.

20. Ohno, Susumu & Others 1985, *World view and Rituals among Japanese and Tamils*. Gakushuin University, Japan.

21. Padnis, Urmila 1979, Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia. A case study of Sri Lanka. *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. XXXV No. 3, July-September.

22. Pathmanathan, S 1979, The Hindu Society in Sri Lanka: Changed & Changing in *Religiousness in Sri Lanka* (ed), John Ross Carter, Marga Institute, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

23. Pusparatnam, P 1993, Poonagari-*An Archaeological Survey*, (in Tamil) University of Jaffna Publication, Sri Lanka.

24. Perinpanayam, R S 1982, *The Karmic Theatre*, The University of Massachusettes Press, Amberst.

25. Pfaffenberger, Bryan 1980, Social Communication in Dravidan Ritual, *Journal of Anthropological Research* 36: 196-219.

26. *Caste in Tamil culture*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.

27. Raghavan, M.D n.d , *Tamil Culture in Ceylon*, Colombo.

28. Ragupathy, P 1983, *Early settlements in Jaffna: An Archaeological survey*, upublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Jaffna, Tirunelvely, Sri Lanka.

29. Ramanathan, Sri T 1972, *Tesawalamai*, Colombo.

30. Sittampalam, S K 1984, Ancient Jaffna - An Archaeological perspective, *Journal of South Asian studies*, Vol. 3, No. 182, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

31. Sivathamby, K 1994, *Thamilar Samookamum, Panpattin meel Kandupidippum* (in Tamil) NCBH, Madras.

32. Shanmugalingam, N 1988, *Agrarian change and the Social Structure, case* study of Jaffna village, Unpublished M A Dissertation, University of Jaffna, Jaffna.

33. _____, 1995, The Annamar cult in Jaffna. In *Tamil folk lore* collection of seminar papers, ed K Shanmugalingam Dept. of Hindu Affairs, Colombo. PP 330-354.

34. Skjonsberg, Else 1982, *A special caste? Tamil women of Sri Lanka*, Zed Press, Caledonian road, London.

35. Schwarz, Waller 1975, *The Tamils of Sri Lanka* London.

36. Silva, C R D 1978, The Politics of University Admissions: Sri Lanka in the *Journal of Social Scientists*, Colombo. Vol. 1, No.2.

37. Suseenthirarajah, S 1979, Religiousness in the Saiva village, in *Religousness in Sri Lanka*, ed. John Ross Carter, Marga Institute, Colombo.

38. Tennent, Eneerson 1860, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island Physical, HIstorical, and Topographical, with notices of its Natural History, Antiquities and Productions*, Colombo.

39. Thambiah 1973, *The laws and customs of the Family of Jaffna*. The Times of India Press, India.

40. *Virakesari* 1995, Express Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Colombo.

41. *Weekend Express* 1996, Express Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Colombo.

4

Many Faces of Durga

Mother goddess worship has been in existence for over 30,000 years which means from the neolithic times (Presten, 1980). Images of female deities have been unearthed by archaeologists from the various parts of Europe, Asia including India. The images unearthed from India are chiefly that of female deities and these must have been the handicraft of the people who lived in this ancient civilization about 5000 years ago. From these findings it is reasonable to assume that mother goddess worship has been in existence in India since the time of the Indus valley civilization.

The mother goddess in the form of Durga is the most impressive and the most formidable of all the female deities referred to in the Hindu pantheon. From the literature available, determining the origin of the goddess appears to be a difficult task and probably is lost in antiquity. The picture is made more complex by the innumerable number of myths and legends built around this deity. It is more likely that the goddess represents a Pre-brahamanic cult of the people who lived scattered throughout India. They must have lived in small groups isolated from one another, and each group must have developed their own worship patterns to suit their own needs and the environment in which they lived. Chaudri (1979) had something similar to say regarding this. In the course of time when man became more civilized, it became quite necessary to fuse these divine ideas, myths and legends under one umbrella of the Hindu pantheon. However, this attempt was not quite satisfactory, as the early history of the goddess still remains unrevealed and the devotees continue to look upon her, exactly in the manner they did from the beginning of this cult. A brief history of the myth, legends relating to the goddess is described in this chapter with the hope that it will give some light on the origin, and the significance of Durga worship. The different forms in which she is worshipped is also examined with the hope of establishing a relationship between a given form of the goddess and the specific need for the creation of such a form.

Tribal Origin

From the literature available and particularly the one by Mazumdar (1906) it is clear she had a tribal origin. The different tribal groups who lived scattered

particularly in the hilly and forest covered regions of India having very little or no protection from wild animals, bad weather conditions, forest fires and illnesses had no choice but to turn their attention to some supernatural being for help and guidance. It is more likely that it is under these circumstances that this cult developed. It is not easy to find an answer as to why they chose a female deity for this, it may be that they were reminded of their mothers who loved them, protected them and cared for, so they may have designed this super natural being in the form of a female deity.

Durga is Mother earth to many of her devotees and is the symbol of fertility of all living beings. She has been worshipped as mother earth by the non-Aryan people of North-India. These primitive people were convinced that this goddess will protect their crops and reward them with a good harvest. As mother earth she holds an important position in their lives and often refer to her as *Vindyavashini* as the goddess of fertility. She is symbolized with large prominent breasts, enlarged abdomen and other features associated with pregnancy. As the goddess of fertility she is always offered animal sacrifice, for blood, is associated with fertility. The tribal people believed that such sacrifice will please the goddess, who in return will give them a rich harvest.

Since the medieval times, the goddess is elevated to a higher position and becomes accepted as an important goddess. From then on, she is given the role as the protector of the cosmos against the demons, the enemies of the *Devars* and the guardian goddess of *Dharma*. Mazumdar quoting from translations of the *Mahabharata*, pronounces that even by this time the goddess retained her original identity and no fusion of the different goddesses into one common form had not taken place (Mazumdar, 1906). Tribal origin is the most acceptable, suggestion and looking for an alternative origin will not help much. It is easy to give alternate suggestions, but to find reasons for such origins is not easy in spite of this, new ideas were developed. It is believed that by the medieval times all the male deities had lost their power and were no longer able to play the role as the protectors of the cosmos. It, therefore became necessary to identify a female deity who will take over this responsibility and Goddess Durga happened to be the one chosen for this. This, in the course of time lead to the evolution of many goddesses like Kali, Pathirakali, Veeramakali, Malini who are all in the malevolent form preferred to have blood, flesh and animal sacrifices as offerings. These are all goddesses known for power and warfare; Durga is the most popular goddess in this regard.

Literary Tradition

The text *Taitriya Aranyaka* of a later vedic period makes the first reference to this goddess. If refers to a single female goddess accompanied by a number of male deities. The description of the female deity has many resemblances to that of Durga.

The reference in the verse form reads as follows:

"Katyayani vidmati, Kanyakumarin Dheemahe
Tuno Durgi Prakothayat"
(Taitriya Aranyaka, 1934: 101.7)

The translation reads as;

"We think of Katyayani and meditate on Kanyakumarin
May Durga help us to prosper"

In fact, the word *Durgi* by itself could be traced to a *Rigvedic* verse, in which she is identified as the sacred fire, the versatile goddess of knowledge and the only deity with the capacity to destroy one's enemies, removes all obstacles and helps one to overcome all forms of *Dukka*, sorrows. Another verse in the same chapter is full of praise to this goddess. Devotees praise her and worship her, for they are confident that their prayers will be answered, whereby they will be freed of all troubles and in the end could become one with the goddess.

According to information available from Taitriya Aranyaka, Siva is said to represent the fusion of two male gods, namely Rudra and Agni. The female deities are many and are placed in two groups. One group consisting of Uma, Parvathi and Ambiga represent the wives of Rudra, and the second group consisting of Kali, Karali, Gowrie, Nirrti and Durga represent the wives of Agni. The goddesses belonging to the first group are calm, peaceful and represent the benevolent forms of the female goddesses. The goddesses belonging to the second group, on the other hand are cruel, fearsome and represent the malevolent forms of the female deities. Mazumdar does not agree with this at all and quoting from two chapters, namely *Virataparvan* and *Bhismaparvan* from the epic *Mahabharata* (1933) argues that there is no reference whatsoever to the effect that Durga is the wife of Siva nor to the fact that Skanda is their son. If at all a reference is made these are nothing but late additions to the earlier texts. As Mazumdar pointed out, these must have been introduced to justify certain new ideas and beliefs that had developed later in the early history of Hindu religion.

Myths of Durga

According to the text *Devi-mahatmya* (1963), Durga is said to have had many incarnations, and further adds that Durga was created to protect and maintain the *dharmic* order and destroy the demons who fight the gods and *Devars*. This role of Durga clearly illustrates the *vaishnavite* idea of the gods and goddesses coming down to the earth when the need arises and particularly when the devotees are in trouble.

Durga as Mahisasura Mardini

1. The most popular myth relates to the killing of the demon who caused untold damage to *Devars* and the gods. Mahisa performed a *yaga* to invoke blessings of the gods, so that he will be the only master of the three worlds. Siva, who was moved by the *yaga* and the penance that the demon underwent granted him his request and the overjoyed demon did not realise the seriousness of the last line pronounced by Siva, which is that he will never be killed by a male combatant. The demon became all powerful and the *Devars* suffered in his hands, left with no alternative, they all gathered together to decide on a course of action they should take.

   The gods were angry, and in this frame of mind emitted all their energy, which formed a mass of bright light which eventually condensed into a beautiful lady, who grew up to kill the demon on behalf of the *Devars* and the gods, which she did and freed them of all their hardships. It is further believed that when Durga was born out of fire each one of the gods had contributed a part of their body in the creation of the goddess. Siva gave her the face, Yama the hair and Vishnu her hands. Because Durga was created to kill the demon each god is also said to have given her a weapon, for instance Siva his trident, Vishnu his *cacara* and Vayu his bow and arrow. This goddess formed from the gods and armed by the gods with the necessary weapons to fight the demon, mounted on her vehicle, the lion and set out into the battlefield. At this time the whole world is said to have experienced a tremor for they were all trembling with fear on seeing the majestic appearance of the goddess (Zimmr 1962). This mighty goddess had no difficulty in fighting the demon, and when the stained body of the demon fell to the ground, the three worlds is said to have trembled in fear. (Plate 4.1).

   Durga, powerful and mighty, created from her energy which she acquired from the male gods, a number of female deities like Kali, Pathirakali and other malevolent goddesses to assist her in the battle field. It is important to note here

that she created only female deities and never a male deity. She generally preferred to fight her opponent single handed however, she was always victorious. It is difficult to understand or even to explain as to how or why so much of importance was given to a goddess in a society well known for its male dominance. Durga never gave up her energy to any god, in fact she has always been the receiver of energy which she uses to fight the demons. It appears, that all the male gods have sacrificed their strength and energy in order to create the goddess and in so doing had lost their potency. The origin and contents of this myth remains mysterious as that of the goddess herself.

2. In another legend described in *Vishnu Purana* (1961). Durga is supposed to have been created by the mystical powers of Vishnu, and he requested the goddess to protect Krishna from demons. The major role of Durga appears to be the destruction of the demons in order to protect the *Devars* and many instances of this nature can be quoted from the earlier texts, for instance *Devi-Mahatmya* refers to Brahma being helped by Durga to fight the demons.

3. *Skanda Purana* (1959-62) has quite a different description of the battle which Durga fought. Here the *Devars* being harassed by the demon had appealed to Siva to protect them. Siva out of sympathy for them agreed, to send his wife Parvathi to fight this mighty demon. Parvathi assumed the form of a Warrior goddess and fought the battle and eventually killed the demon and restored peace in the world of *Devars*. The identity of Parvathi with Durga is based on this myth. This legend continues to say, at the end of the battle, Parvathi had transformed the demon into a buffalo to be used as a vehicle to carry her about. As Durga, she is also associated with the killing of the demons Sumbha and Nisumbha. In all these instances Durga is believed to be the incarnation of Parvathi.

Other Myths of Durga

1. Consort of Siva:

The myth recorded by Abbe J.A Dubois (1906) is very different and relates to the sex life of Siva, particularly the one with Durga. According to one of the popular myths, Durga grew up in the hermitage of the sage Hemantha, while at the hermitage she fell in love with Siva, and without the knowledge of the sage she deserted the hermitage to live with Siva. The sage was annoyed over the whole affair, and on her return he wanted to test her virginity. Durga having anticipated the wrath of the father, had with her power restored her virginity before returning

to the hermitage. Ganga, the first wife of Siva on hearing this, was disturbed and accused Siva for making love at his ripe old age and that too as a mendicant without any means. Siva however, pleaded with her to allow him to have Durga as his wife, which he finally obtained. They had two sons, Ganapathy and Karthikeya, both of whom hold important positions in the Hindu pantheon. However, another legend in the same Bengali literature refer to Ganpathy and Karthikeya as the sons of Ganga (O' Flaherty, 1973).

2. *Separation from Siva:*

The myth associated with Cellattaman as Durga is somewhat different to that already described (Van den Hoek, 1979). Iswaran and Iswari, meaning Siva and Parvathi are described to have roamed through the wild forests and enjoyed themselves, when Iswari is said to have become thirsty and in order to quench her thirst, killed a buffalo and drank its blood, and after eating the flesh, removed the bones and made a garland, which she wore proudly around her neck. Iswaran was horrified at this site and vouched that she remains in the forest area as the guardian goddess of the forests.

Another myth says that, she was separated purposely from Siva to maintain her virginity and thereby to have more power (Dubois, 1906, Shanmugalingam, 1995).

3. *Sister/wife of Vishnu:*

The myth relating to Vishnu is quite interesting. Devaki is the sister of Hamsa, who was anxious to have the Kingdom to himself. Inorder to achieve this, he ordered that all the male children born to Devaki should be executed. Devaki was grieved, and when a son was born, she without anyone's knowledge exchanged it for a female child of Yasoda. When Hamsa not knowing the exchange made, took the child from Devaki and knocked its head against a stone, to the surprise of Hamsa, the child took to the air and disappeared. Devaki's child grew in the comfort of Yasoda. Devaki in this myth is identified as Durga, the sister of Vasudeva as described in the text, *Durga-stotra in the Virata parvan* (Mahabharata, 1933). In another legend Durga is identified as the wife of Vishnu as Mahalaksmi, the supreme being (Srivastava, 1978).

4. *Mahisa's love for Durga:*

According to *Deve-bhagavata-purana*, Mahisa is said to be in love with Durga and further it refers to the feelings expressed by Mahisa as follows;

"beauty of the goddess who should not be met in battle,
but to be loved (*Devi-bhagavata purana*, 1969)

Philosophical Explanation of Durga

Durga is always portrayed as having certain specific or distinctive characteristics, and each of these features is identified with very important ideas expressed in the Hindu philosophy. In *Devi-Mahatmaya* (1963) she is identified with *Sakti, Maya and Prakrti*. As Sakti she has the divine power which provides the energy that is required for all creative activities. Infact, Sakti means much higher than this, and this *Sakti* is goddess herself. According to Hindu belief, a male without his Sakti is ineffective, and *Sakti* means much higher than this, and this Sakti is goddess herself. The belief that Sakti is energy and energy is Sakti is based on the legend relating to the creation of Durga from the energy of the male gods to destroy the demon *Mahisasura*. It is perhaps, based on this idea that *Sakti* and energy are synonymous that Durga is given prominence as terrible fighter, and the creator of the Universe.

Durga as *Maya* has assisted Vishnu in the battlefield against the demons, Mahisa, Kattamba and many others. Durga is said to have taken the form of *Maya* to deceive the demon, thereby Vishnu could kill the demon without much difficulty. In the Hindu philosophy, *Maya* is defined as ego, this *Maya* always clouds an individual and prevents a person from taking the right decision and very often such a person find it difficult to establish his true identity with Brahma. *Maya* is also considered as the main form behind the very act of creation.

Durga as Prakrti with Earth

Durga is also identified as Prakrti and with earth. Prakrti as the primodial matter from which all material things have evolved, is being evolved and will evolve. As Prakrti Durga is synonymous with the physical world, the world which she herself created, which she sustains and protects. In *Devi-Mahatmaya*, Durga is identified as the earth itself, and it is the means by which she maintains the cosmic stability. As mother earth, she supports, and protects all living things. As *Sahambari* she provides the world with food from her own body.

From the description given so far it is clear that this goddess Durga had many variations and this is reflected in the different forms in which she is worshipped.

These differences particularly relate to her appearance, and the weapons she carries. Images of these different forms are available in India, and in the recent times from

Sri Lanka as well. The text *Kalicapuranam* (1978) refers to the nine forms of Durga as Nava Durga.

1. As goddess Sailputri, she rides on a bull and wears a crescent on her head and holds a trident in one of her arms.
2. As goddess Brahmacarini, she holds the rosary in one arm and in the other water pot. (*satvic* form).
3. As goddess Chandakanda, she rides on a kite and has a fearsome appearance.
4. As goddess Skandamata, she rides on a lion and holds a lotus bud in one of her hands.
5. As goddess Kushmanda, she holds a pot of blood in her hands.
6. As goddess Katyayani, she rides on a tiger and is depicted killing the demon with a sword. (*Rajesic*).
7. As goddess Kalatra. appearance is fearsome but with a grim smile.
8. As goddess Mata Gowri, she rides on a white elephant.
9. As goddess Siddhiyayani, she is depicted with many semi-gods in attendance.

The literature published in the recent times for eg. in Sri Durga Saptasati by Tharmapura Athinam (1985) also identifies nine forms of Durga as follows;

1. Vana Durga
2. Jala Durga
3. Seethala Durga
4. Vishnu Durga
5. Brahma Durga
6. Rudra Durga
7. Mata Durga
8. Sulini Durga
9. Vanni Durga

All these different forms of the Durga are known from the different parts of India belonging to different periods of the history and all of them have gained an important position in the Hindu pantheon.

Iconography and Epigraphy

The Iconographic and Epigraphic evidences particularly of the Gupta period certainly reveal information of the goddess, which indicates a much later development of the cult. Although, Durga is known from an earlier period, probably it is in the Gupta period that she gained popularity, particularly amongst the North Indian *Vaisnavites*. This is also the period when a large number of temples were constructed and female deities were enshrined in them. Many of those temples are dedicated to the *Maha* Goddess meaning Durga, and she was mainly known as Mahisasura mardani. In Bihar, the goddess is depicted with a lolling tongue and carrying a skull, trident and *angusa* in each of the three arms while the fourth is in the *abeya* form.

In South India, reference to this goddess is made during the *Pallava* period. The images found at Mamallapuram, though varied, are useful to trace the origin of the goddess. One of the carvings is very similar to the North Indian images. This figure is depicted with four arms, in one arm she carries the *chank*, in another the *cacara* (upper arms), the lower right hand is in the *abeya* position while the left lower hand is held around her waist. Another figure from Mamallapuram is quite different. This has resembalance to *maya* at Trichirapalli, in South India. In front of this image, a male figure is represented in the bowing position. This figure can be identified with a reference from *Cilappathikaram*, (1950), according to which a tribal group by the name of *Eiyanar* always offer to the goddess one of their fellowmen in gratitude for a successful hunting mission or for defeating another tribal group.

From the Iconographic and Epigraphic representations it may be said that the goddess cult became dominant and scattered throughout the Indian continent.

The developoment of the *Tantric* religious system has contributed towards harmonizing the diverse forms of the Durga cult. According to this system, goddesses with fearsome appearances (malevolent form) are worshipped by *saivites* with the hope that she would destroy their enemies and bless them to achieve their objective in life.

Durga Worship

Purpose and patterns

1. Fertility Gains

In certain parts of India, Durga, the fertility goddess is given importance as the protector of the fields and the one who gives a good harvest. She is supposed to

represent the power inherent in plants, which enable them to grow flowers and fruits. The officiating priest at the harvest festival observes a strict pattern of rituals and *pujas* and is similar to that of *Navaratri* festival.

Soil from different parts of the area and even that from the door step of prostitutes is dug up using the horn of a buffalo and placed in the altar for planting the grain. Water required for *abishekam* and watering the plants is brought from the holy rivers. The juice of the fruits grown in the area and sugarcane are specifically used for the *abhishekam*. Nine different grains are sown, and these are identified with the nine forms of the Durga. During the *puja*, the priest recites the following prayer as he sows each grain,

> "Om, you are the grains, Om, you are life
> You are the life of the gods, You are our life
> Your are our inner life, You have a long life
> You give us our life Om, the sun's rays
> will give you the milk of life and Varna
> nourishes you with water" (Kane, 1930)

From the above prayer, it is evident that the goddess Durga is both the giver of life, and life of all beings. She is the goddess who makes life possible in this planet of ours.

The manner in which the Navaratri festival is celebrated in the villages of Bengal still retains its tribal origin. The festival is celebrated during the month of the *Aswin* on the *Sukula Astmi*, and it is a festival observed by young girls for their maiden goddess. On the first day of the festival the young girls go out to collect clay in order to make an image of the goddess. Once made it is placed in a special place, and pictures of Hari, Parvathi, Laksmi are painted on the walls and rituals are observed for nine days and on the last day the ladies carry the image of the goddess in procession which is finally immersed in water amidst cries and songs sung in praise of the goddess.

In certain parts of Bengal during the Dasara festival a plantain tree covered in cloth is placed to the right of the main goddess in the Sanctum Sanctorum and is worshipped as Vana Durga.

In Sambalpur, a village in Bengal as quoted by Mazumdar (1906), the young girls gather in the village garden by night and sing songs and celebrate the day

in the name of the goddess, but the girls are also known to sing indecent songs, one cannot imagine as to why such songs are sung.

Mazumdar who carried out a detailed study on Durga cult in this region suggests that Durga had always been worshipped as an important tribal goddess, and that it is with the coming of Brahamanism that these tribal practices gave way for a more or less *sanskritized* pattern of worship, yet for all in some of the temples remnants of the tribal origin is seen as in the Sambalpur village temple.

2. *Military Gains*

The tenth day festival of Dasara is known as *Ayutha Puja*. Importance is given to the goddess in her malevolent form ie, the form in which she is ready for the battle with weapons in her hands, fearsome face and mounted on a lion with one foot pressing against the dead body of the buffalo. On this day verses, praising the goddess, from *Devi-Mahatmaya* is recited by the devotees lead by the chief priest of the temple. She is, to the devotees a warrior goddess and a protector of the cosmos. In the past, the kings and the soldiers before a battle would come to the temple to request the goddess to bless them with success. The same act is repeated, by placing the sword at the feet of the goddess and requesting her to bless them all and protect their Kingdom on the *Dasara* festival day.

According to Abbe Dubois (1906), in Mysore in the nineteenth century, *Dasara* was venerated by the soldiers, and the festival ended with the sacrifice of a ram to the goddess.

Dasara in Rajputana, during the 19th century was a festival conducted to invoke the blessings on their country in particular. On the day of the festival, the soldiers lead by the king will ride galloping on horseback and return in a procession. This probably is a demonstration to show their power and strength to the people.

Dasara festival, is also a day for prayers and there are selected verses and *mantras* from the scriptures which are recited by all those who gather in the temple. *Dharmasindhu* is a special prayer which is recited by the king and is as follows:

"May Aparajita wearing a shining necklace and resplendent golden belt and the one who is fond of doing good to all bestow victory and success for me and my kingdom" (Kane, 1930:5: 190).

In *Niranayasindhu* a prayer is included which has to be recited when the weapons placed in the altar are blessed and it reads as follows:

"Oh goddess ruling our gods may the army consisting of four divisions achieve a position with no enemies around and blessed with victory by your grace in the battles against our enemies" (Kane, 1930:193).

The heroes of the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* prayed at the feet of Durga for military gains, this has certainly influenced the pattern of worship.

Infact, it is suggested that these customs were not in practice at the time the epics were written, but when the goddess cult became prevalent it became necessary to include such ideas into the epics as well. It is therefore felt that these are late additions. This probably was done, with the intention of making the goddess a popular deity in the Hindu pantheon. These two epics still continue to have an impact in the life of the Hindus living scattered throughout the country and the world at large: From this, it is only correct to say that the writers who introduced this new cult have indeed achieved their intentions in making this goddess a popular one. *Virata-Parva* refers to an incident in which Arjuna is said to have prayed to the goddess to grant him success in the battle which he had to fight against his own people and the chapter ends with advise to all and is as follows:

"If you pray to goddess you will also be blessed like "Arjuna".

In another chapter, also in *Virata-Parava*, Dharmar in supposed to have prayed requesting the goddess to bless him with success in the battlefield which he is forced to fight against his relatives. According to this legend, the Pandavas and their wife Thropatha had to live disguised for one year in a different land, and before venturing out on this mission, Dharmar it is said to have buried all the weapons and requested Durga to protect them and their weapons and also to be with them in the battlefield. Durga appeared in front of Dharmar at the end of the prayers and granted him his request.

Similarly, reference to Durga worship is given in the *Ramayana* too. In the chapter, *Devi-Bhagavata Purana*, (1969), reference is made to the prayers that Rama recited on the advise of Narada in order to invoke blessings of the goddess in the battle against Ravana and to bring back his queen, Sita whom Ravana had taken away as a captive to his country with the hope of marrying her. Here too, at the end of the puja, the goddess appeared and blessed him. In the Bengali version of the *Ramayana* written in about the fifteenth century Rama it is quoted as having fixed the Dasara *puja* from spring to autumn in the month of Aswin as he was very anxious to fight Ravana and reach Sita who was kept in captivity. He did this because he thought that it was too long a period to wait for the next

spring before he could perform the *puja*. It is from then on that *Navaratri* festival is celebrated in the month of Aswin, which is the most important festival celebrated in the name of Goddess Durga.

There are many more legends to illustrate the might of the deity as a warrior goddess, but the one relating to Sivaji the seventeeth century Marati military leader is worth recording. According the popular belief Sivaji is said to have received the sword from the goddesss Bhavani, ever since he gave the same respect to the sword as he would to the goddess. Before going out into the battlefield, he would place the sword at the feet of the goddess to invoke her blessings and to overthrow the enemy. Infact, Sivaji had named the sword after the goddess who gave it to him, and it is said that he always started a battle on the Dasara day. In a like manner, the Pandyan Prince had received a blessed sword from the goddess when he had to fight the Muslims who invaded South India (Gode, 1940:82-97).

This tradition is now changed, particularly with the changes in the political scene with no more kings and kingdoms, people of different trades place their tools of livelihood, a pen to a teacher/student, saw to a carpenter, a key to the driver and the like. These are all placed at the foot of the goddess and the devotees believe that the goddess will listen to their prayers and bless them. Thus one can see that the goddess Durga continues her role as the goddess of victory and success in life.

3. *Family Gain*

North India is a Partilocal and a Partriarchal society and it is the custom amongst the North Indian Hindus to give their female children away in marriage at a very tender age. They undergo severe hardship at the hands of their in-laws. Dasara festival time is the only occasion when they return to their parents. They are welcomed with songs and they remain with their family members and enjoy the festival. When the day dawns for their return, the family members bid them farewell amidst tears and singing of religious song in praise of the goddess.

During the festival, Durga herself is cast in the role of a returning daughter to her parents. Her husband is Siva and is the mother of Ganesha and Skanda. Devotional songs are sung to welcome the goddess home and to bid her farewell on the last day of the festival. Durga is also said to have mothered Laksmi and Saraswathie as well.

This is a festival that brings the goddess and devotees very close together. The devotees look upon the goddess as someone who has come back home to relax

and to be away from the sufferings she underwent in her husband's place, the husband meaning Siva who spends his time drinking and smoking intoxicating herbs. (Thompson 1923: 98) The parents when they celebrate probably think of the sufferings their daugthers undergo, and the children likewise compare their miserable life with that of Durga, and probably this is a means by which they expose to their kith and kin the amount of hardships they undergo in the home of their husbands.

4. New Face for Marital gain

In the Tamil tradition Durga was mainly looked upon as a goddess for victory only for ritual purposes during the first three days of *Navaratri*. However, one could see the original alliance of the deity with fertility by sowing nine different grains around the *kumbam* which symbolizes the goddess (Plate 4.2).

Apart from this, the worship of this goddess is not significant. Although she is enshrined as '*Vadakku Vai Chelvi*' lady facing north (Sami, 1975:48) as referred to in *Cilappathikaram* in the north outer courtyard of the temples dedicated to Siva or in the Northern side of the outer wal of the Sanctum Sanctorum in between the *komuki* and the sacred well.

In the last two decades or so, Goddess Durga has taken a dramatic change and one could find a few temples dedicated to this goddess in Tamil Nadu, for e.g. a temple for 'Vana Durga' is at Kumbakonam, Kathiramangalam and a 'Vishnu Durga' temple at padiswaram which are of very recent development (Mangayar Malar, 1993).

In Jaffna with a strong *saivite* tradition, there was no room for Durga in the Sanctum Sanctorum according to 'Saiva *Agamam*', but now many temples are dedicated to this goddess, and the one at Tellippalai forms the origin of the new face of Durga.

The purpose for which she is worshipped and the patterns of worship have changed. (Plate 4.3) She is now popular for marital gains and her role as a warrior goddess is of the past and it is interesting to note here that it is in this period, Jaffna changed, and it has become a war-torn area, however no one seems to ask her for military gains.

References

1. Basam, A.C 1971, *The wonder that was India*, London.
2. Chaudri, N.C 1979, *Hinduism, a religion to live by*, London: Chatto and Windus.
3. *Cilappathikaram* 1950, Ed. Dr Saminathaiyer and Kalyanasundaraiyar Madras: Kabeer Press, P478.
4. Das, R K 1964, *Temples of Tamil Nadu*, Bombay.
5. *Davi-Bhagavata purana* 1969, Banars: Pandita Pustakalaya.
6. *Devi-Mahatmaya* 1963, *The Glorification of the Great goddess* edited & Translated by Vasudeva S Agrwala, Banaras: All India Kashiraj Trust.
7. Dubois, Abbe J A 1906, *Hindu manners, customs & ceremonies* Oxford: Clarandon press.
8. Gode, P K 1940-41, Hari Kavis contribution to the problem of the Bhavani Sward of shivaji the great, *New India Antiguary*-3. (PP 82-97).
9. *Kalika Purana* 1978, Bombay: Venkateswara press.

   Kane, Pandurang Vaman-1930-62, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5 Vols, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute.
10. *Mahabharata* 1933, Edited by Vishnu S Sukhthankar, etal Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
11. *Mangayar Malar* 1933, Women Magazine published by K Rajendran on behalf Bharathan Publications Pvt. Ltd., ed. Manjula Ramesh, Jawaharlal Nehru road, Madras.
12. Mazumdar, B C 1906, Durga: Her origin and History of *Journal of royal Asiatic Society*, Colombo.
13. O' Flaherty, Wendy. D 1973, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva*. London: Oxford University, Oress.
14. Presten, James J 1980, *Cult of the Goddess*, Wave land Press, Inc; Prospect Heights, Illinois.
15. Sami, P L 1975, *The Worship of Mother Goddess in Tamil Literture*, Madras: New century Book House Private Ltd. (In Tamil-PP 8).
16. Shanmugalingam, N 1995, Successful Marriage of Kanyakumari: A Sociological study of a religious centre in Jaffna. *Journal of Comparative religion*, University of Upsala, Sweeden.
17. *Skanda Purana* (5 vols.) 1959-62, Culcutta Manasukharajah Press.
18. *Sri Durga Saptasati* 1958, Tharmapura Aatheenam, South India.
19. Srivastava, Balram 1978, *Iconography of Sakti*, Chaukhambha Orientalia, A House of Oriental & Antiguarian books, Varanasi, Delhi.
20. *Taitriya Aranyaka* (2 vol.) 1934-38, Poona: Anandasrama Sanskrit series.
21. Thompson, Edward. J & Authur Marshman Spencer 1923, *Translation of Bangali Lyrics*, Sakta Culcutta: Association Press.

22. Van den Hoek, A W 1979, The goddess of the Northern Gate: Cellattamman as the Divine warrior of Madurai, In Marc Gaborieau and Alice Thorner, eds; *Asie de Sud: Traditions et changements* Paris: Editions du centre National de la Researche Scientifigue.

23. Zimmer, Heinrich 1962, *Myths & Symbols of India Art & Civilization*, ed. Joseph campbell, New York: Harper & Row (PP 1:56).

5

Temples of Durga

5.1. Tellippalai Durga

Temple setting and the Village

The temple of Durga is situated on the Jaffna - Kankesanturai road, which is linked to the neighbouring villages by a number of cross roads. The temple therefore can be reached without much difficulty from the surrounding villages. In addition, the northern Sri Lankan rail route to Kankesanturai also passes through this village. The devotees who patronize this temple come not only from the neighbouring villages but from distant places as well.

The village of Tellippalai, like many other villages in Jaffna, is divided into small pockets called *kurichchis*, the larger of these *kurichchis* are linked to the main road by by-roads, which are quite large with a good transport service. However, the smaller *kurichchis* are provided with only gravel roads and some of the most interior ones with only a foot-path and transport from here to the main road is rather difficult and the only mode of transport is the bicycle or small bullock-carts.

The Durga temple is situated a few yards to the interior from the main road on its western side is the *kuruchchi*, Ulukodai. The area is now renamed as *Durgapuram*, where devotees come from the various parts of the country both day and night throughout the year.

According to the 1980 census, the population in this village is 6,160 and about 87% of this population are Hindus, and the balance 13% are Christians belonging to various denominations (Table 5.1)

Table 5.1: Population according to religion & sex- Tellippali

Religion	Population		Total
	Male	Female	
Hindus	2,898	2,822	5,680
Christian	257	223	480

Source: Censes report, 1980.

The occupation of the people is quite varied, but a large number about 57% are engaged in agricultural activities, particularly the cultivation of cash crops, chiefly onions, chillies and tobacco. About 27% of the population hold government jobs, the balance 16% are either employed as masons, carpenters, smiths of various kinds or are self employed, chiefly as retail traders.

Table 5.2: Occupation of the People at Tellippalai.

Occupation	No. of Families
Government Jobs	185
Agriculture-Farmers	321
Labourers	211
Masons	98
Goldsmiths	53
Carpenters	22
Total	890

Source: Field Survey, Tellippalai.

The population distribution is uneven, a majority of them are concentrated along the main trunk road and the by roads. The junctions, where four or more number of roads meet are thickly populated. These are places which form the main trade centres attracting a large number of people from all parts of the village and from all walks of life. However, the area around the temple and the nearby vicinity remains lonely. The land adjacent, to the temple has a dense growth of Palmyrah palms, and similar palmgroves are found in the interior of the village, namely in the small *kurichchis*, where the labour class from the bottom of the caste stratification have their dwellings. Tellippalai, though defined as a village it is far from being a village for it has many leading schools, hospitals, Government and Semi-Government offices, market centres, mansioned houses and places of worship, which are found in any other Sri Lankan towns.

During the time of the foreign rule, particularly that of the British a number of English Medium schools were established throughout the country, in order to spread their religion and to give the basic education necessary to man the government and plantation sectors in their colonies. Union College, in the heart of Tellippalai, where the by-roads from Pannalai, Allaveddy in the west, Maviddapuram, Kankesanturai in the north and Kadduvan, Vasavilan in the east meet on the Kankesanturai-Jafffna trunk road is a leading educational institution.

This school functioned as a charity institution which served the poor peasant population from the area, who formed an easy target for missionary activities and conversion of the children from Hinduism to the Christian faith. Inspite of this conversion, the school did help the village children to achieve a good English education and thereby good employment opportunities both in the government and private sectors. Infact some of them found employment in the British Colonies of Malaya (Malaysia) and Singapore. Those who migrated to these countries not only established themselves but also were in a position to draw in their kith and kin to these countries. As a result, the village of Tellippalai today has a number of Singapore pensioners.

The growth of this school, and that too in the heart of Tellippalai posed a threat to Hindu religion. The leading educationists like Taylor Thuraippapilai, Chinnapah, Chinniah and other felt the need to establish an alternate Hindu institution which would serve the Hindu children in a Hindu atmosphere.

Mahajana College was established to achieve these objectives. The school is situated on the by-road leading to the village of Pannalai and Allaveddy lying to the west of the junction and about two miles from Union College. In addition to these, two more fairly large secondary schools and a small number of junior schools are scattered throughout the village. These were also established to achieve the same objectives.

A well established hospital on the by-road running eastward from the junction, serves the needs of the village. In addition to this, a co-operative hospital is also available, and is situated close to the Durga temple on the main trunk road itself. This hospital was founded by the co-operative movement, which is a well organized institution in Jaffna and which has contributed in many ways to the development of the villages.

The following table illustrated the caste distribution of Tellippalai.

Table 5.3: Caste Distribution of Tellippalai.

Vellalar	51%
Koviyar	09%
Nattuvar	01%
Thattar (goldsmith)	05%
Thachar (carpenter)	02%
Paraiyar (drum beater)	11%
Pallar	21%

Source: Field Survey, Tellippalai.

The social stratification according to caste is well established in this village and the *Vellalars* who occupy the apex of this stratification claim their ancestry from the Chola dynasty of South India and the *Vellalar* elites proudly refer to the saying of the chronicle of Jaffna, *Kailayamalai*; "*Sempaka Mappanan*, a *Kalingai Vellalan* and his relative *Poopanan* and *Kanagaraya Chetty* settled in Tellippalai with their *kundimakkal*" (Rasanayagam, 1926 : 72). The society is strongly caste biased, and this may have in the course of time contributed to the class stratification as well (Shanmugalingam, 1988). The *Vellalar* dominated others, and they had and still have the monopoly over land, education, jobs and thereby wealth and a good position in life. The *Nalavar* and *pallar* caste groups were denied all these, and remained poor and worked as labourers in the lands belonging to the *Vellalar* landlords. However, as referred to by Raghavan (n.d: 177) in this village, one finds, the intermediate caste group namely the *Koviar* who enjoy a comparatively independent standing and they do not serve the *Vellalar*, and they are recognized by all as the ritual equals of Vellalar, and free education here is seen exercising its own levelling influence, advancing them socially. Inspite of this traditional caste system, education paved the path for the formation of middle class and the upper middle class elites. In this manner Tellippalai produced many educationists, professionals including social reformers and politicians who are known at the national level.

The family, which is a basic traditional institution of Jaffna social system is well pronounced in this village as well. With the strong arranged marriage system of Jaffna, the problems faced by the society in forming the family institution is very much evident at Tellippalai. Education as an industry, resulted in mass production of unemployed educated youths, posed problems in the marriage market as well. The socio-political climate and accompanied exodus of eligible bachelors to foreign lands, made this problem more acute and the price of the groom increased by many folds as illustrated in the chapter on social structure of Jaffna.

Religious Life

With social changes and experiences followed by modernisation the village still remains a strong religiosity. The different faiths Christianity, Hinduism have a strong hold with many temples and churches scattered throughout the village, some of these are large and others small. Predominantly the Hindu temples are dedicated to the mother goddess namely Mariamman, Kasivisaladchchi Amman and Thothara Amman

and the Durga Temple, the main temple of study. The religio-cultural system of this village is very much inter-woven with those of the cluster villages.

Tellippalai Durga

This temple is nearly over 300 years old. Until very recently it remained a very small and insignificant one. It was generally patronized only when someone suffers from infectious diseases like measles, small-pox etc. The family members bring the afflicted person to the temple to pay homage to the goddess for having been with them and helping the patient to recover without complications. Such diseases are generally referred to as *Ammal*, and even now the villagers believe that the deity had taken possession of the afflicted person.

Origin of the Temple

The earliest record relating to this temple available is from the Maviddapuram Temple which is a temple of historical importance and situated two miles north of Durga Temple on the Jaffna-K.K.S. road. This record refers to the interconnection between the two temples. Apart from this, the only document available on the history of the temple is the recently published '*Temple History*' (1965) by the temple management. The information gathered from the devotees and the temple management during the field work, mostly referred to the same myths given in the temple history. However, there are variations in the information about the origin and history of the temple.

I give below the myths related to the origin;

1. Kadirgamar as the Initiator: A religious personality by the name of Kadirgamar from Ulukkodai, a *kurichchi* in the heart of Tellippalai is described as the founder of the temple in the magazines and booklets published by the temple (Temple History 1965). In the past, it was customary for Saivites to go on pilgrimage to India, and Kadirgamar is said to have gone to India on several occasions to fulfil his vows. During such a visit, he had the opportunity to visit the temple of Bagawathy, Kanyakumari. Kadirgamar is said to have been blessed by the goddess Bagawathy, from then on he became a totally different man full of courage and strength, which enabled him to carry out his role as a spiritual leader. These incidents are elaborately recorded in the temple publication (1965) which states as follows:

> Swami Vivekhananda, the disciple of Ramakrishna Paramhamsar, visited Kanyakumari to receive the blessings of the goddess Bagawathy

before venturing out on his journey to Chicago to address at the Congress of the world religions. In a like manner, Kadirgamar received the blessings from the same goddess before he set out on his mission as a religious leader.

While in India, he visited many temples including those in North India, particularly the *Sakti pedas* totalling over hundred scattered throughout India and South Asia. While at the Kasiviswanatha temple, Benares, he became enlightened and realized the purpose of his life.

In the Swapriswari *Peda* he came across a very eminent sage who accepted him as his disciple and from him he learnt the importance of the goddess Durga, and the significance of worshipping her in the *cacara* form (a mystical diagram engraved on a metal plate). He also learnt from him all the rituals that should be practised by holy men who are the followers of the Durga cult. He practised these rituals repeatedly and as a result he developed the power of communicating directly with the goddess. The *Guru* was now convinced that the time had come for Kathirgamar to return to his home country. He brought with him the cacara and the 'kendy' (brass vessel with a spout) containing the Ganga - Durga 'Theertham' (holy water) which symbolize the goddess herself and these were the objects he worshipped while at Kasi and these he carried with him from this holy city to his native place, Tellippalai.

On his homeward journey through Tamil Nadu, he had the good fortune of worshipping at Mathurai Meenadchchi Amman temple. Here he gained additional strength and blessings from the goddess Meenadchchi, the consort of Nadarajah, Siva in the dancing form. Mathuraiampathy is also an important *Sakti peda* in India. Kadirgamar spent a couple of weeks in this temple and meditated. The pleased goddess appeared in all her glory and blessed him and elevated him to the level of a saint.

Kadirgamar, continued onward and reached the southern most point of India called *Sethu karai* and this coastal holy place is in close proximity to the northern most point in Sri Lanka. He arrived at Keerimalai a coastal village which is about seven miles north of his native village, Tellippalai. The journey from Keerimalai to Tellippalai in those days had to be by bullock-cart or on foot. Kadirgamar chose to walk the distance, and this he did quite comfortably. However, when he arrived at the present temple site, he could walk no further, tiredness overtook and he was forced to take rest. When he awoke from his deep sleep, he realized that the goddess had decided to reside amidst the

palm and the *mahua* trees and he became determined to fulfil the wishes of the goddess.

The goddess appeared to Kadirgamar in the form of a beam of light and instructed him to build a small hut for her amidst the *mahua* trees. This, Kadirgamar did and a temple to the deity was constructed in the same surroundings as the present temple: which stands majestic against the western skies amidst the dense growth of the *Palm* grooves and the *mahua* trees. The same village atmosphere still remains around the periphery of the present temple. The *cacara* which Kadirgamar brought was installed at the foot of the *mahua* tree. The *kendi* was placed by the side, which also formed one of the symbols of worship. Kadirgamar spent the rest of his days in service to the goddess, and in order to do maximum service he lived in a hut in the same premises. Kadirgamar was the temple priest, the labourer and did all the physical work in connection with the temple.

He conducted all the temple rituals. He never made any attempt to popularise the temple, this he left to the goddess to achieve. People in the surrounding villages became curious and anxious to visit the temple at the time of the evening puja. During the *puja*, Cobras crawled into the temple as if from nowhere and took part in the rituals, at the end of it they were offered milk and fruits, and no sooner this ceremony was over they disappeared exactly in the same manner as they came in. More people began to come to the temple just to witness this scene and gradually to take part in the rituals and at the same time accepted Kadirgamar as a saint and vouched to build the temple into a popular place of worship. This incident spread through the nook and corner of the village and devotees began to gather in large numbers at the temple particularly during *puja* time.

It was after this that a proper temple structure was constructed with mud and a cadjan roof.

Even after this, Kadirgamar continued to function as the officiating priest, which he carried out most effectively and in a very pious atmosphere. However his advancing age began to tax him and he was anxious to leave a successor who would function as the officiating priest and takeover the management of the temple. One day the goddess appeared in his dream and pronounced that a successor would come to the temple at the right time. True to her word, a brahmin priest arrived from Kasi, to the happiness of all, particulary Kadirgmar. The contended Kadirgamar spent his last days at the feet of the goddess and peacefully passed away (Temple history, 1965).

2. *Annamar Link with Durga:* A variation from the above myth is given by depressed caste people of this village. While accepting most of Kadirgamar's story, but with the following change;

"Siva and Durga accompanied Kathirgamar on his return journey from India, and when they reached Tellippalai, Durga opted to remain amongst the *panankoodal* while Siva continued a little further and finally settled down under the huge Banyan tree. This temple for Siva still remains with its folk traditions as the Annamar *Kovil*".

In addition they expressed the dissatisfaction over Thangammah, the present President of the temple for not accepting the above story and also for refusing the invitation to give discourses in their renewed 'Siva-Annamar Temple'. They were unhappy for not being given the co-operation to build their temple. They added that if Thangammah had given them the support, their temple too would flourish in the same manner as the Durga temple.

3. *Rejecting cacara-kendi myth:* While the large number of the devotees accepted and repeated the myth as described in the Temple Publication, a small number refuted this *cacara-kendi* myth. They further emphasised that originally only a stone was placed in the *panamkoodal* to represent the goddess Durga or Kannakai and that giving animal sacrifice was a common feature in this temple.

Patronage of the Temple and Development

The Durga temple at Tellippalai remained neglected and insignificant between 1825 and 1953. Kandiah (1990) refers to this as the dark ages of the temple. However, there is no written document to account for this state of the temple, whatever information available is only from oral traditions and this refers to one Kathiresu *Udayar* who had managed the temple for quite a long period. Kathiresu *Udayar* and his successor probably did nothing to develop the temple nor to maintain it. During their management only regular *pujas* were held *Purana* recitals were carried out.

The *Navaratri* festival was always celebrated with pomp and pageant during which the image of the god Skanda is taken in procession from Maviddapuram to Durga temple. It is here that Skanda cut the banana tree which depicts the scene where the demon Mahisa was slain. This clearly indicates the close association between the two temples.

In 1953, Naganatha *Adigaram* who succeeded *Udayar* family brought major changes in the temple administration. Instead of one man control, it was transfered to the temple Trustee Board. He believed that a Board of Management will be in a better

position to attend to the needs of a temple, instead of a single man attending to it. The board considered the restructuring of the temple as its first objective, and in order to achieve this, a temple renovation and construction committee was set up. It was stated that, it took nearly ten long years to achieve the goal, it was during the *Kumbabishekam* following the construction work, that the *cacara* was replaced by the image of the deity already referred to. In addition to the image of Durga, other images namely Vyravar, Nagathambiran were also propitiated and an additional courtyard called *Nirutta mandapam* was also constructed.

The temple management changed hands again with Thiyagarajah as the President and Ponnampalam as the Secretary and finally when Jeyaratnam took over the presidency dramatic changes were introduced in the temple management. The temple Trustee Board unlike the earlier ones consited of members across the society and members were selected based on their involvements towards the temple, their educational achievements and recognition in society. Jeyaratnam was the principal of Mahajana college, a leading educational institution in the country. He was a good administrator and the experience he gained at Mahajana placed him in a good position, and this he put to good use and the temple developed quite rapidly in his tenure of six year administration. Thangammah Appacuddy, a teacher by profession functioned earlier as treasurer and then as Vice-President of the Board. I would like to mention here that I was a student at Mahajana College at this time and Jeyaratnam selected a few of us to be members of the temple choir, and we were taken to the temple during festival time to sing religious songs. At this time the temple remained quite small, but very well managed, rituals and festivals were carried out in a manner expected of traditional Hindu temples. However, the temple could not have the continued service of Jeyaratnam, as he suddenly passed away in 1977.

Thangammah Appacuddy was promoted as the President of the Board with the demise of Jeyaratnam, a post she still continues to hold. In a society with male dominance giving recognition to a lady is rather strange and refuting the ideas expressed in women studies, that religious authority and public office is always in the hands of males. The temple continues to gain popularity both within and outside the country like India, Malaysia and the western countries like Canada, France and other places where the emigrant Tamils now live. Thangammah was quite popular for her religious discourses, and devotees came in increased numbers in order to listen to her discourses as well.

New rituals were introduced by her to fulfil the needs of the youth, particularly young females of marriageable age who came to the temple to ask from the goddess

a husband for them, and young youth who came asking for employment, particularly in the foreign countries like the Middle East, Canada, Australia and the European countries. This sudden increase in the number of devotees coming to the temple increased the income and this is indicated in table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Untial (till) collection of Tellippalai Durga

Year	Untial collection in Rupees
1965	29.75
1970	864.02
1977	14,325,55
1978	23,439,63
1980	1,12,556,40

Source: Annual reports of the Tellippalai Durga Temple.

The increased wealth was used to restructure the temple to suit the needs of the growing devotees. A number of smaller shrine rooms were constructed to house the important deities from the Hindu pantheon in their appropriate positions according to the Agamic traditions (Fig. 5.1).

Even the courtyards were made more spacious. A *Rajakopuram* (plate 5.1) was constructed at the front end of the temple. This now stands majestically against the western sky facing east.

The *Rajakopuram* is massive and is sixty three feet in height with five gateways from the base to the top. Beautiful images of the Goddess Durga and of other gods and goddesses are carved out on the four sides of the *kopuram*. The construction work on the *kopuram* was carried out by Valvanoor Thavalingam *Sthapathy* of Tamil Nadu. A number of sculptors worked under his supervision. This sculptor is a popular personality in this field from South India. In order to get his services, Thangammah had to make the request through Harridas Swami of *Gnananda Samajam*, Madras. The *Samajam* has many branches scattered throughout India. Harridas Swami was able to collect funds for the construction work through these branches and also from the merchant community with whom he had close contacts. He used part of this money to obtain the images of Duwara Ganapathy, Duwara Balasubramaniyar, Sanganithy and Pathumanithy for the temple. When this *Swami* came for the *Kumbaabishekam*, he brought with him a Kendi containing the Kasi-Ganga *theertha* blessed by Dharmpala Athinam, Thiruparanthal Athinam and Gnananda Samajam, the treasure needed for the *Kumbaabishekam* and the *pattu* to be presented to the

chief sculptor who designed the *Rajakopuram*. He participated in the entire proceedings and on the last day he climbed up the *kopuram* and gave a discourse from there. He like Thangammah, is famous for his religious discourses and this attracted more devotees to the temple. His discourse was broadcast over Radio (Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation), which received tremendous applause from the Hindus of this country and in addition the Tamil daily papers published from Colombo and Jaffna also gave sufficient publicity to the proceedings.

It should be recorded here that the construction work was completed within a very short time by the efforts of all. They never suffered for want of money, all the funds neceessary for the construction work was donated by devotees, well wishers and merchant community. The contractors engaged in work contributed lavishly and some of them became directly involved in the construction work itself.

In 1978, a *Chithra ther* (chariot) was constructed for the goddess at a cost of several thousand rupees. The entire cost of construction was borne out from *kanikai* (contributions) made by the devotees. The *ther* was designed by Thambithurai, a famous Artist from the Arumugam Sitapalayam of Thirunelevely, Jaffna. He not only designed the *ther* but every aspect of the construction work was supervised by him. It took only one year to complete the work, which according to general standards on work of this nature, is a massive task. It is believed that this was accomplished within such a short time of one year due to the management skill of Thangammah and co-operation of those who were involved in it.

The Annapoorani *mandampan* which was originally planned for *Annathanam* (serving meals for needy) was restructured but is now used as a hall where wedding ceremonies are conducted. A new *theertha kerni* (holy tank) was constructed outside the outer courtyard in the north end of the temple at a cost of five lakhs, fifty five thousand, eight hundred and seventy four rupees, funds donated by the devotees. It is a massive tank about hundred square feet in area and a depth of about twenty five to thirty feet.

The area where it is constructed has granite underneath, and to construct a tank of this dimension is not easy, however this was completed within a short time. In the four corners of the tank are small shrine rooms with ornamented *vimanam* (roof). At the front end of the tank are placed a row of *poorna-kumbam* (a garlanded brass pot containing water, coconut and mango leaves). At the opposite end of the tank is a small platform with a beautiful designed *vimanam*; The goddess is assembled on this, on the day of the 'Theertha thiruvila' (water cutting ceremony) the last day of the annual festival.

Social Activities

The temple is also engaged in social activities, the devotees who come from distant places, and particularly the needy are cared for. This recalls a similar practice in South India during the Chola period. The Durga temple is a splendid example of this original tradition. It has, to its credit, an orphanage for female children, *Annasalai* (place where food is served), pilgrims rest room and a library. This library is the gift of Thangammah herself. To begin with, the orphanage was quite a small place, and the building adjacent to the library was used for this purpose. However, at present the orphans have increased in number, as a result of the present war situation, it became necessary to construct a two storey building to accommodate this large number of helpless children.

Durga Mahalir Illam

This house for orphans and children from broken families was started in 1982, this is the first of its kind in a Hindu administration. It started in a small way with only nine children, but in 1986 a two storey building was constructed to accommodate about hundred children. Gradually the home expanded with a library, a study hall, a home garden, a big dining hall and a sewing centre. It is now registered as an orphanage and receives a certain amount of financial assistance from the government. However, the home is maintained chiefly from temple income and a sum of rupees fifteen thousand is given to the home each month by the government. In addition it receives special gifts from devotees. All this money is used for day to day expenses, health and education. The Hindu public for the first time became conscious of the social problems and two young ladies both sisters supply the uniform material needed by the children and the Tellippalai Co-operative Society, provides the expenses for the balance clothing required by the children. A lawyer from Mallakam, now living in Colombo has deposited rupees one lakh, with the Institution, the interest from this is utilized for the education of the children. The Bank of Ceylon has deposited a fixed sum of money in the name of each child.

The home is looked after by women and about seven to eight of them are employed to look into the routine duties of the home. The women are all unmarried, A male is employed to attend to marketing and the like. One of the girls is referred to as sister Jathiswary Poorani, who dresses like a catholic nun and is much respected.

The children attend school in the neighbouring areas. In the interest of the children, special arrangements are made to give them extra classes in subjects they need. On Fridays religious classes are given including *Thirumurai othal* and *Yoga*. Most of

these classes are taken by Thangammah, or by others under her personal supervision. Arrangements are made to guide the children in Fine Arts including dance, music and the like. Most of the classes are taken on a voluntary basis. It is note worthy that, at present four of them are studying in the University.

In addition, opportunities are given to give training in cottage industries mainly of the traditional type and some of the items produced are income generating. The girls are given a good education and some of them have been selected to follow apprenticeship courses. This shows the interest that the administration is taking for each child.

The children are expected to work in the temple on a roster basis, attending to work like cleaning the premises, the utensils and making garlands and the like. The children are divided into groups and they are encouraged to take part in cultural and sports activities. It is interesting to note that these groups are named Thilagavathy, Vasuki and Mangayarkkarasi after exemplary characters from traditional Hindu myths.

The Institution at present is a well established one with fixed asset worth Rs. 1,558,200.90 and bank account worth Rs. 1,081,299.13.

Youth Development

The youth of the area impressed by the rapid growth of the temple came forward to render their services to the temple and a 'Thondar Sabai', a club under the name of Young Men's Hindu Association of Tellippalai was established. The society has now an office of its own in the outer courtyard of the temple. The tremendous amount of social work they carry out is commendable particularly during the annual festival days when devotees in very large numbers come to the temple from all parts of the country and other social activities of the temple.

The New Face and the New Explanations

The goddess enshrined in the Sanctum Sanctorum is in the Satvic form, and the devotees including the present management refer to her as Vishnu Durga.

It is most likely and from information given by the devotees, this particular image must have been installed at the time of the first Kumbaabishekam in 1825. The face is calm and very appealing to the devotee and the goddess has four arms, in the right upper hand she carries the cacara, and in the left upper the changu, while in the lower

left arm she carries the skull of the demon she killed, and the lower right arm is in the abeya position. The goddess is mounted on the slained body of the demon. (Plate 5.2)

According to Thangammah the deity faces east and carries cacara and changu, and therefore is 'Vishnu Durga' in Satvic form. She further added that the sculptor, Thavalingam Sthapathy had impressed on her this idea. However when I had an opportunity to meet the same sculptor in Colombo, Slave Island Murugan Temple, where he was engaged in restructuring the temple and adding a new shrine room for Durga. When questioned about the abnormally large size of the image of Durga placed in the *vimanam*, he said that he acted according to the wishes of the management. To a question relating to Tellippalai Durga and the position of the Sanctum Sanctorum he remained silent.

When the sculptors from Jaffna were questioned about the positioning of the Tellippalai Durga facing east in the Sanctum Sanctorum, they said that in the agamic traditions there is no temple for Durga. Her place in the temple is between the back wall of the Sanctum Sanctorum and the inner *theertha kundu*, well, from which water is drawn for the temple rituals and they further added "The positioning will *cool* the goddess who in always in a violent mood".

Regarding the relationship between the Satvic form and facing east the temple management, was not in a position to give any explanation.

There is no consistency in the information available in the written form too. Kandiah (1990) in his book titled 'Sri Durga Devi Temple at Tellippalai' refer to the goddess as one with a calm face. The Kumbaabisheka Malar reflects the divided opinion of the devotees. In the forward given by the Chief Priest of Perumal Kovil, Jaffna the goddess is referred to as Vishnu-Durga. One of the songs in the same magazine refer to the goddess as the consort of Siva, the song when translated reads as follows;

> Oh Durga, it is not easy to approach
> Brahma and krishna
> .....
> But, with the right kind of knowledge
> Oh Durga you can be approached
> The goddess who is always with
> Lord Siva who dances in the outer space"

However, on page 25 in the same magazine Durga is referred to as the sister of Jeganathan, meaning Vishnu, another reference on the same page refer to the goddess as "*Kottavai Devi*", still another reference on the same page refer to her as the goddess who never departs from Siva.

In reference to the new face another explanation is also given in the temple publications. the *cacara* and *kendi* are given as the explanation for the new face and the sudden rise of the temple. In order to establish this idea they quoted examples from India. In this regard they refer to the article by Swami Athavayananda Natha Saraswathi of Sayapura Sakti *peda*, according to which,

> When a *cacara* is installed in the temple, all the devotees benefit very much by it and the effect of this lasts for thousands of years (yantra for wealth) A yantra was installed at the temple of Thirupathi by Jagath Guru Athi Chankarachchariar nearly 2000 years ago and this as expected has made this temple one of the richest temple in India, which collects millions of rupees from the *untial* per year. Similarly the Goddess Ahilandeswary at the Thiruvanaikkadu temple is in the *ghora* form, and devotees were reluctant to visit this temple through fear. The few who plucked courage and visisted the temple, subsequently underwent physical suffering including fever, dysentry and the like. It was therefore felt that it was necessary to change the *ghora* aspects of the diety in one way or the other. The goddess now wears a '*shristra ratne thadangal*' earnings and this has completely changed the temple atmosphere, many devotees now come to the temple and observe all the rituals without any fear. The goddess is now said to be in the *bogha* form, calm, tender and very appealing to her devotees. It is the confirmed belief that the *shri cacara* is the most important and powerful of all *cacaras* that are commonly used in the temples as symbols of worship". (Kumbaabisheka malar, 1981).

These contradictions are only of academic interest but means nothing to the devotees who come to see her in thousands and to them she is simply "Durgai Amman" meaning Mother Durga, who will care for them and bless them.

Durga Thuranthari

Thangammah Appacuddy

Durga Thuranthari a popular title by which Thangammah Appacuddy is known today, an honour given to her by well wishers and devotees. *Thuram* denotes

responsibility and *thari* means carrying, in other words, someone who carries the responsibilities of Durga. She hails from a hindu vellala family of Tellippalai. She is the second child in a family of four children and is how in her late 70s. She is one of the most respected ladies in this country, in particular amongst the hindus in Sri Lanka.

The influence of her personality can be seen from the simple devotee to the elite of the society. All of them refer to her as "Ammah" and more than this, the more ardent devotees look up to her as a model of the goddess herself.

A devotee who came to the Kumbaabishekam in 1981 from Thenmaradchchi, Jaffna had this to say about her which clearly indicates the feelings that the devotees have for her,

> Oh mother! you took the form of a snake
> and remained hidden in the bush
> The educated did see you but they did not give
> any thought to it.
> The one who performed thavam, thangam did
> show you to us.
> As a result she was able to achieve eternal
> bliss in this world and the other.
> Kavalar Ragunathan showed Nallur Kanthan,
> Navalar showed the hidden Thirukketheswaram,
> Thangam gave us the mighty Durga temple.
> Placed the mother in the Sanctum Sanctorum and
> the children on the two sides
> The priceless flag post and the Vasantha
> mandapam
> These she gave us, where we could concentrate our
> fickle minds and pray.

In Thangammah we see Durga the mighty goddess. (Kumbaabisheka Malar, 1981)

The role of Thangammah as a religious leader is admired not only by the devotees but also by leading educationists, Professor Vithiyananthan, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Jaffna had this to say, "Thangammah Appacuddy is comparable to Navalar, for she has like him done her best to preserve the Hindu religion, her contribution to religion is commendable" (Vithiyananthan, 1981). In recognition of her religious and social work, the university of Jaffna, Sri Lanka confered on her the honourary doctorate degree at the 1999 convocation. (plate 5.3).

Thangammah started her life in the path of Navalar by giving religious discourses in the temples on auspicious days or at festival times. It may be said that she gave discourses in almost every temple in Jaffna and devotees, both young and old gathered in large numbers to listen to the voice of the silver tongued lady. She has the talent and the capacity to relate puranic literature, to understand day to day life, and to present it in a flowery language that is very attractive to the listener. Her discourses are quite different from the traditional ones, there is no singing and no musical instruments used. The entire narration is by the lady herself, but the devotees listen spell bound.

Her discourses are popular not only in Sri Lanka, but in India, Malaysia and other Western countries where Hindu Tamils have now emigrated to.

The lady with this attractive personality was elected as the President of the Board of Trustees, of the Durga Temple in 1977. As President, she captivated the hearts of even those who did not accept her, for it is during her leadership, that the Durga temple developed from its humble origin to its present state. Today, it is one of the richest Hindu temples. Its fame spread through the nook and corner of this country. The basic factor behind this sudden popularity of the temple is the devotion with which she attends to her duties as the President of the Board of trustee. In order to do a good job, she did not hesitate to resign from her services as a Teacher before she reached her retirement age. In addition, she not only identified the social problems and the social needs of her devotees, but tried to find solutions to these problems. It is in this regard she introduced drastic changes in the temple rituals to evoke the blessings of Durga.

In order to bring comfort to the socially handicapped Hindus, she used the temple as the base for social activities. As a first step she established a home for the needy female children and subsequently brought more welfare facilities. This naturally built up a sense of admiration for the temple administration and particularly Thangammah Appacuddy. The temple unlike other Hindu temples gained the full support of hundreds of devotees, leading to the sudden rise of the temple.

It is difficult to believe how a society with male dominance, a lady was chosen to head the activities of the temple. Under normal conditions the male chauvinism would have rejected without any reason her leadership, however talented a person may be. One can attribute such a break through on the charismatic qualities of Thangammah. This does not mean that every orthodox Hindu accepted her leadership, there were cries of protest at the initial stages, but in the course of time it disappeared and she conquered all of them with her charming personality.

She lost her mother when she was only 10 years old and her father at the age of 14. She had her education at Union College, Tellippalai. At the end of her secondary school education she was keen to proceed further, but the financial constraints could not permit it. During her teenage, women were not encouraged to join government service, and the only permissible one is to seek employment as a teacher. With the education she received she had to be satisfied in getting a job as a Teacher in one of the Estate Schools. This job was non-pensionable and thus she thought it is advisable to qualify as a trained teacher, which she achieved. With this, she was in a position to get a job in a better developed school. As a teacher she served in many secondary schools, scattered throughout the country. During this period she had ample opportunities to develop herself as a public figure.

As a spinster, she dedicated herself for to the betterment of her family and the development of her career and became a reputed teacher.

It may be stated, that Thangammah could not marry for the want of a dowry. When she had accumulated some wealth, her family responsibilities stood in the forefront. She was satisfied in seeing her sisters and brothers settled in family life, particularly from then on, she dedicated her life to serve to others. After serving outside Jaffna she managed to get a transfer to Union College, her old school closer to her residence. It was from here she developed the interest for literature and religious activities, and developed her talents in the art of religious discourses. Her affection towards religion and her sense of dedication enabled her to hold important positions in the temple administrative committee, initially as Treasurer, Vice-President and subsequently as President of the society.

According to Thangammah, it was only after the last Kumbaabishekam that the temple became a place of importance when many devotees began to patronize the temple. The temple entered into a new era of prosperity. While referring to the goddess, she said that the main deity in the temple sanctum sanctorum is Vishnu Durga in the satvic form having *chanku* and *cacara* in her hands. The goddess in the main shrine room faces east and obviously, the goddess is in the *bogha* form, full of loving and giving, she added. She is, as wife of Narayana, the goddess for protection of all living organism, big or small. The temple according to her is constructed according to Agamic traditions, and is the only Durga temple where the annual festival is celebrated. When asked about the significance of Durga and the reasons behind her interpretation of the goddess as Vishnu Durga in the *bogha* form, she said these changes were carried out on the instruction of Coomaraswamy Kurukkal from Atchuvelly, Jaffna and Seetha Rama Sastrikal. She further added that the word Durga

represnts the three forms of *Sakti Bogha, Yoha* and *ghora* among the three, *Bogha* is the most important one. She further added, that the goddess appears in a form most wanted by the devotees.

The success of her administration, she claims is the result of the early training she had, initially as a student in a Christian atmosphere and subsequently as a young teacher also in Christian and Muslim schools. She was full of admiration for the disciplined life of the Sisters in the Convent and was determined to follow in their footsteps. The rigid rules and compulsory worship by the Muslims five times a day, and their discipline influenced her very much, she remarked.

She further added that the training she had as an active member of the Trustee Board Treasurer and Vice-President gave her ample opportunity to prepare herself for the responsibilities she holds now. In addition, her job as a teacher in her home town Tellippalai gave her the opportunity to know the people particularly the young who have gone through her hands as students in one school or another. They are the volunteers who now assist her in many ways including the social work centered around the temple.

Thangammah was concerned about the anxiety of the younger generation of the present-day Jaffna, particularly the female of marriageable age (plate 5.4). During the long interviews I had with her, I was able to appriciate her concern, for this particular group. In one such interview, she confessed, the bitter experience she had in her younger days and this disappointment resulted in developing a strong will power and the urge to help young females to achieve a married status with the help of the goddess, she concluded.

Rituals of Tellippalai Durga

The Durga temple at Tellippalai is characterized by multi worship pattern. This has now spread to quite a number of other Amman temples in the country. Where there are none new ones have come up. This is particularly so in Colombo and its suburbs. In the last 20 years or so, Durga temples have come up in the western world, particularly in Canada, France and Norway.

The worshipping patterns in most Durga temples can be categoriesed into three form:

(1) *Sanskritized* Worship

(2) Folk Worship,

(3) New Worship Patterns.

01. Sanskritized Worship: Sanskritized worship is one of the oldest and the most strongly established worship patterns in Jaffna. The role played by the English Educated, Tamil Scholar and Saiva Saint Arumuga Nawalar from Nallur, Jaffna is enormous in this regard. He worked and fought hard to develop and maintain the agamic traditions in the Hindu Temples. The religious practices adopted in this temple are commonly referred to as Brahmanic rituals, where a Brahmin Priest forms the mediator between the devotee and the gods and goddesses. The officiating priest performs the religious rites and the devotees are only observers and not participants.

However, the devotees never feel that they are distant from the deities for he is so accustomed to these modes of practices. In such temples, the devotees can perform a simple *arccanai* by giving the priest a tray containing fruits, flowers, coconut, beetle leaves, arecanut, camphor, jossticks and cash. The priest will offer these to the deity and break the coconut and wave the lit oil and camphor *tipam* (lamps). He will recite the mantra as he does the *puja*. At the end of it, he returns the tray with holy ash, sandalwood and *kumkum*. The devotees receives these with both hands, feeling happy and contended. Devotees feel as if they have communicated directly with the diety, and blessed. The devotee can also give more money and perform an *abishekam*, bathing the gods in milk, honey, fruits, soaked sandalwood, oil and holy water. This is usually carried as *nerti*. It is the custom for someone to make a vow (nerti) to grant them material success, or when someone falls sick for recovery. When their request is fulfilled, they carry out the *nerti*. This can cost a few thousands of rupees. It is interesting to note here, that even the poor devotees will not hesitate to fulfil their *nerti*, by selling their available jewellery or pawning them.

The temple celebrates all the festivals referred to in the Hindu almanac. The *Mahotsavam*, the annual festival is carried out with pomp and pageantry. The cost of it is born out by a single devotee, who is referred to as the *upayakarar*. The Amman festivals like *Adisevvai*, a special Tuesday festival in the month of July is given greater emphasis and is observed according to ancient traditions. But every Tuesday becomes an *Adisevvai* in this temple.

One of the important and significant agamic rites conducted in this temple in the recent times is the *Chandihomam*. This is a particular form of sacrifice meant for the goddess Durga. In July 1983, vast sums of money were spent in order to conduct this. This is the first of its kind in Jaffna in modern times. More than hundred Priests under the leadership of Dr K Kailasanatha Kurukkal, a former Professor of Hindu

Civilization, at the University of Jaffna was selected to conduct this ritual which lasted for three days. A special pandal of over 10 feet high was erected in the outer courtyard for this purpose.

The rituals were carried out with many thousands of people witnessing it. It is recorded that a large cart load of the sacred fire sticks, along with gallons of ghee, heaps of cereals, flowers fruits and other relevant material were burnt. It is also said that on the last day, the devotees saw the image of Durga as illustrated in the Rigveda in the sacred flame as it touched the roof of the pandal. To conduct a ritual of this nature, once by the temple is considered to be a big achievement. But in modern times large scale rituals of this nature called *Homa puja* has become a common feature in almost all the big Amman temples.

In Sri Lanka Cacara *puja* worship is quite a new innovation in Amman temples. It is, in fact, a form of Tantric worship. Earlier, this was practised only at Munneswaram, one of the five Ancient Sivan temples in Sri Lanka. This is a very advanced form of worship. In this system there is no image but only plates of metal with mantra inscribed on them and arranged flat on the floor or in the form of *kopuram*. The *cacara* inscribed embraces all the Devas living in the *andangal*, *pindangal* and *brahmandangal*.

This ritual was initially popularized by the venerable Sangarachchariar in India. From here it was introduced at the Munneswaram temple by Dr. Kailasanatha Kurukkal. This temple is regarded as one of the major Sakti *peda* in Sri Lanka. It is now carried out at Thambiah Sathiram, Kotahena too. It is gaining grounds at the other Durga temples too.

02. Folk Patterns of Worship: Folk patterns of Worship is another attraction here. Initially the temple was fully immersed in folk traditions. The temple is now sanskritized, but is unable to give up its original folk traditions completely. Devotees who come to this temple still prefer to communicate with their goddess in their own simple ways. Traditionally, the devotees cook milk rice flavoured with jaggery and sweet meats in the open air. These are then offered to the goddess with a simple *puja*, where the male of the family, lights a camphor lamp and waves it in front of the goddess, and the entire family members join in prayers and sing songs in praise of the goddess. This is in the form of thanksgiving to the goddess for her kindness. This ceremony traditionally was carried out in any part of the outer courtyard, but now, a shed is put up in the outer courtyard and the devotees are expected to do their cooking within the shed, and not anywhere else. The rest of the ceremony described

above is conducted in the eastern end of the outer courtyard. In other words, the courtyard facing the Sanctum Sanctorum. The interest with which folk worship is practised supports Shanmugasundaram's idea (1979:101), that sanskritization cannot completely wipe out old traditions.

Kavadi dance is also a form of folk worship, and it is quite common in the Murugan temples scatered throughout the country, like Sellasanathy, Maviddapuram, Nallur and Kathirgamam. In the temples in Jaffna, *Kavadi* dance is popular on the last two days, (*Ther* and *Theertha*) of the annual festival to fulfil a *nerti*. A number of devotees come in procession with the *kavadi*, covering long distances. The men carry the peacock *kavadi*, while the women carry *paal-kavadi* (pot of milk decorated around the neck of the pot with margosa leaves). Nowadays small children also take part in the procession with their small *kavadis*. In most cases they do it because they are happy over their achievements and a few do it because they fear that they might become the victim of the wrath of the goddess, failing to oblige *nerti*.

The *kavadi* dancers gather in the outer courtyard, from here they lead the procession of the gods and goddesses when they are taken around the outer courtyard of the temple.

Initially *kavadi* dance was performed only by the depressed caste groups, but subsequently everyone irrespective of caste barriers began to show an interest in *kavadi*. *Kavadi* dance is performed initially with *uddukku, Nathasuram* and *Thavil*, two traditional musical instruments, the former is a wind instrument, and the latter a kind of a drum are used.

Devotees sing devotional songs as they march along and when it reaches its peak a few devotees become possessed, and in this state they give astrological predictions to the devotees who approach them. Generally there is a large crowd seen gathering round the man or woman in trance.

In the Durga temple, the devotional songs sung are those initially composed for Muthumari Amman, but here the name Muthumarie is substituted by Durga, without paying much consideration to its meaning.

There are different forms of *kavadi*, the simple *kavadi* has a beauty and charm. A few are fearful. One often wonders as to why the devotees make such painful *nertis*. However, the devotee performing these acts of penance does not seem to feel the pain at all.

Thula kavadi is one such category. Here the performer suspends himself on a long pole. In this position the *kavadi* is taken in procession through the outer courtyard amidst cheers of Haro Hara.

Sethil kavadi is another peculiar form, where, a large number of tiny metal pieces each in the form of a miniature Vel is pierced into the back of a devotee and pulled by means of a long rope. Occasionally, a hard pull is given by the person who conducts the kavadi to the rhythm of the drum and *Nathasuram*. A longer *Vel* made of silver, pierced through both the cheeks of a devotee, is another form of *kavadi*.

In the earlier times, people preferred to perform *kavadi* dance, at the various Murugan temples in Jaffna like Selva Sannathi, Nallur and Maviddapuram. However the present civil war in the country has forced to change venue to newer temples. It is under such trying condition Durga temple came to be selected as the next best choice.

0.3. New Worship Patterns: Around 1970s, new rituals came into popularity. Although these were introduced in Tellippalai they have now spread quite rapidly into the nook and corners of the Country, particularly where Hindus are found. Until very recently, very little was known about these rituals and people followed them without understanding the significance associated with them. But now these have attracted the attention of learned men. There are booklets available which describes the pujas and their significance. Just as in folk worship the devotee is able to communicate directly with the deity concerned, but unlike folk worship a priest is always at the ceremony to guide them. There are quite a number of these rituals and I shall deal wtih the most popular ones.

Elumichchampala Villakku:

This is lime lamp lighting and is a very popular one. Here, the lime is cut into two, and the contents of each half is squeezed out, the skin is then turned inside out and is used as a lamp to light. Each is filled with oil and a wick made of cloth is placed inside for lighting. The devotees carry out the ritual alone or in groups.

This is performed by young girls afflicted with mars in the seventh position, who wish to have husbands. This is to be carried cut for seven or nine consecutive weeks. It is important to note here that this ritual is performed in front of the GajaLaksmi shrine at Tellippalai.

Sumangali Puja

This *puja* is performed by both unmarried and married women requesting for husbands, and for a long and happy wedded life respectively. This *puja* is particularly carried out during the VaraLaksmi *nonpu* (fast). It is a ritual of fast, praise and worship. It is supposed to bestow on women an everlasting married life. It is a *puja* which takes well over an hour, and during the *puja*, the participants take an active part. It is also a very expensive *puja* as well and an individual may need at least a minimum of rupees two thousand for the expenses incurred and those who can afford it may spend much more than this. During the ritual a *Sumangali* brhamin lady, usually the wife of the chief priest, or a subordinate priest is selected for this. She is dressed in a *kurai*, an expensive bridal sarie which is offered by the devotee and to this lady one by one all the items offered to a bride in a wedding ceremony including a *tali*, the symbol of a *Sumangali* status are given. At the end of the ceremony the brhamin lady blesses the devotee saying, "*Theerga Sumangali pawa*," be a *Sumangali* for ever.

Thiruvillakku puja

This is a very popular *puja* at Tellippalai Durga Temple. It is a ritual performed by married women, but now even unmarried women participate in this. Unlike the *Sevvai Viratham*, this is undertaken by all whether they are afflicted by any form of *thosam* or not. In the 1960s, this ritual was only available at the Perumal Kovil, one of the three Vishnu temples in Jaffna. The devotees gather in large numbers in the temple, once a year in the month of August on a full moon day to celebrate the event. The same ritual was introduced at Tellippalai and is celebrated in the month of *Karthikai* (November) *Pournamie*, full moon day. At the time of the introduction only a few ladies participated, but now the number has increased. The demand to be a participant at this ritual is enormous and it became necessary to introduce certain rules by the management to ease the discomfort experienced by the devotees. Each particpant is expected to pay a sum of rupees twenty towards the expenses and reserve a place for her. The devotees are expected to take their seats for the ritual according to the numbers allocated to them. This number is given acording to the order in which the tickets are bought. Each devotee is expected to bring a *kuthuvillakku* (brass lamp) along with her.

The *puja* is conducted in the inner courtyard where the Laksmi Shrine is and the devotees take their place from here and spread outwards. A large *kuthuvillakku* is placed in front of the Gaja Laksmi Shrine, the officiating priest sits in front of this large *kuthuvillaku* and performs the entire ritual. Just before he starts reciting the mantra and pefroming the

puja, he reads aloud the names of the participants with their brith star and then proceeds with the ceremony. The priest recites the mantra, quite distinctly but slowly, so that the participants can also repeat the same. As the mantra is recited, the participants offer flowers and *kumkum* to their *kuthuvillakku*, which represents the goddess. During the ceremony quite often Thangammah talks to the devotees over the microphone and explains to them the significance of the *Thiruvillakku puja* and quite often she gives the necessary instructions to the devotees. At the end of the *puja*, the priest waves the brass lamp with burning camphor in front of the Sanctum Sanctorum and then passes it to the devotees who repeats the same in front of their own lamp. At the end of the ritual, each devotee is anxious to take the oil lamp in the lit state to their homes. They believe, the success of carrying it home in the lit condition is an indication that the goddess had accepted one's puja. It is only the rich who are able to achieve this, for they have a vehicle to take the lamp home. But the poor have no choice but to blow it off before taking it home. Here they light the lamp again and pray and that's all they could do. However, one could see the disappointment written on their faces, when they blow off the lamp at the end of the ritual.

There is one more factor which affects the religiosity of the ritual, namely the extent of pomp and pageantry introduced. The richer women always come dressed in very expensive saries like a bride. The poor cannot afford and many of them are even reluctant to participate for they do not have the money to buy such expensive saries, but they are anxious to observe the ritual.

This ritual which was observed only once a year on the *Karthikai Pournamie* day, has now become a monthly ritual and is being celebrated on each pournamie day. Gombrich & Obeyesekera (1990), while refering to new innovations namely *Bhodi puja* in Buddhist religion has this to say:

> "Events have proved that *Bodhi puja* has
> indeed become popular but, in spreading,
> has changed its forms and its meaning ..."

Even here it looks as if the ritual has lost its orginal intentions and is now more or less business oriented, for even unmarried girls and also children are allowed to participate in this *puja*.

The methodology of the ritual varies from temple to temple and the whole procedure is adopted to suit the time and space available. About twenty to thiry years ago, *Thiruvillakku puja* was very little known amongst the *Saivite* Hindus. But now it has become almost a household word and even a small child will be able to give some

information about the puja. A number of booklets are now available which narrate this festival in some detail, but prior to 1990, not a single reference was available in relation to this.

The period of study extended from 1986 onwards and during this period, a number of devotees were identified and interviewed. These interviews were largely carried out on Tuesdays of every week, which is the day allocated for the worship of the Amman. From this, the devotees coming to the temple can be categorised into two groups namely one group coming to take part in the new rituals, other coming for the traditional worship. The devotees belonging to the first group chiefly consisted of unmarried young girls accompanied by their mothers and married ladies. The second group consisted of a cross section of the population of adults and children of both sexes. During the interview age, sex, education, occupation and family background of the devotees were recorded. The majority of the young girls were in their secondary school, a few at the university level and the remaining unemployed school dropouts. A few however were educated and holding jobs. Following table illustrates this.

Table 5.5

Percentage of devotees by sex and marital status.
(From a sample of 500 devotees)

	Total	Unmarried
Female	87%	65%
Male	13%	10%

Source: Field survey, 1981

Nearly 77% of the unmarried female devotees who perform *Elumichchampala Villakku* came to ask the goddess for a husband of this 08% were with Mars affliction (table 5.6).

Table 5.6:

Percentage of persons performing *Elumichchampala Villakku* and purposes.
(From a sample of 500 devotees)

1. Unmarried girls for marital needs	69%
i. for Mars affliction	08%
ii. other delays in marriage	77%
2. Married women for *Mangalya Palam*	22%
3. Boys on behalf of their sisters	01%

Source: field survey, 1981.

It should be noted here, that there were a few men who took part in the new rituals normally meant for women. For example, in one instance a young boy had come to beg the goddess to cure his sisters pimples by performing the *Elumichchampala Villakku*. Table 5.7, illustrates the percentage of female devotees who came specifically to observe, *Thiruvillaku puja* and the purposes for which this is observed.

Table 5.7

Percentage of persons performing *Thiruvillakku puja* and their purpose, 1981. (From a sample of 500 devotees)

Unmarried girls for marital needs	56%
1. Married women	
i. for their daughters' marital needs	19%
ii. for their sons's marital needs	02%
iii. for their *mangalya palam*	23%
	100%

(Source: field survey, 1981)

Table 5.8: Indicates that the number of devotees performing Elumichchampala Villakku increased in numbers when compared to the data illustrated in Table 5.6.

Table 5.8

Number of devotees performed *Elumichchampala villakku* and (Recorded only on Tuesdays)

Year	1981	1983	1986	1988	1990.
Number of devotees performing *Elumichchampala villakku*	79	86	85	98	115

Source: Field Survey, Tellippalai Durga.

Apart from this, devotees coming to observe day to day puja were also interviewed by taking judgement samples on Tuesdays, every January in 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Case Studies

Over and above the data given so far, a few cases who come to this temple with very simple or complex problems were interviewed and will be described in detail. This, it is felt, will give an idea of the purpose for which the cross section of the devotees come to this temple, the background of the devotees, how they were attracted or directed towards this temple and their achievements wil be considered in detail.

Table 5.9
Persons doing normal *Archanai* percentage with purposes.

	1981 Jan.	1986 Jan.	1991 Jan.
1. Married needs	79%	72%	67%
2. Success in exams	06%	05%	02%
3. Employment & Promotion	11%	12%	09%
4. Illness			
i. Infections	00%	00%	00%
ii. Other	04%	03%	02%
5. Safety of Life	00%	08%	20%
	100%	100%	100%

(Source : Field survey, Tellippalai Durga)

Devotees perform *Thiruvillakku puja*

Case A: A woman, aged forty eight, from Thannithalvu, married with five children, three boys and two girls. Educated upto the O/L, is the first lady from this kurichchi to have gone through secondary school education. She married at the age of 36, her husband was self-employed, had a mini van which transported passengers from Chunnakam and Tellippalai. At present, he is employed in the Middle-East as a heavy vehicle driver.

The lady has a handloom at home and this gives her additional income for her day to day expenses and thereby she is able to save a good portion of the husband's earnings in the Bank. After leaving school, and while at home having nothing else to look for went in for the handloom industry and people visisted her to purchase garments. It is one of the customers who became friendly with her and introduced her to the new face of the Goddess Durga.

Almost 5 years after observing the Tuesday fast and participating in the Thiruvillakku puja, she got married.

She is fully convinced that it is by the grace of the goddess that she found a husband to her liking, blessed with children and in addition the husband received foreign employment. She, with tears in her eyes admitted that it is this foreign employment that helped her to meet the family expenses in war torn Jaffna, where food is not available or is very expensive.

She still continues to observe the fasting and the ritual which she commenced as a maiden but now she observes this for the safety of her husband, her *mangalyam* and for family property.

Case B: A beautiful young girl from the neighbouring village of Mallakam, aged twenty three, school dropouts, eldest in the family, father sickly, his income as a clerk in a Co-operative is far below the family needs of a large family, consisting of the mother, father, six children and grand parents.

The girl after her secondary school education tried to get a job, having failed approached the goddess for a husband. She was introduced to the new rituals by a neighbour. She fasted on Tuesdays, a special day for *Amman* and also performed the *Thiruvillakku puja* once a year. It is to be noted here, that this is a *puja* performed by the *Sumangalis*, married women as mentioned earlier, but in this temple even unmarried girls observe this puja. According to this girl, she observed this for nearly 5 years. On one such occasion she offered her vantage position to an elderly lady who could not see the ceremony from her position. The lady was highly moved at this and decided then and there to choose the girl as her daughter-in-law. The girl is now married and they both continue to perform the same puja in gratitude and for continued blessings for the future.

Devotees perform *Elumichchampala Villakku*

Case C: A girl from Kondavil, a neighbouring village six miles from this temple, aged thrity four, hails from a lower middle-class family, both parents are teachers in a village primary school. The girl is the eldest of six children, four girls and two boys, both younger to the girls. The girl has Mars in the 7th house, and this she believes is the cause for the delay in her marriage. The parents became worried with her advancing age and with two more girls already in the marriage market. The mother from her friends came to know of the significance of this ritual as a remedy for such problems. She therefore persuaded her daughter to observe the same. I interviewed the girl, one year after she commenced the ritual but she was still waiting for a husband. She has not lost hopes and is certain that she will be successful in the end, and would continue to fast until her wishes are fulfilled.

Case D: A thirty eight year old girl from Navanthurai, a place closer to Jaffna town, Convent educated, passed the Advanced Level, being a victim of standardization introduced by the government in the early 70s could not enter

the University. She tried to get a job but was not successful. The anxious parents began to look for a suitable husband. Mars afflictions in the seventh house is said to have delayed this too. When she was in her early 20s, the astrologer had advised her to pray to the goddess who resides in the north about ten miles from her house. She discussed this with her friends, and it transpired that one of them had been successful in fiding a husband after observing the Tuesday fast and making a *nerti* at the Durga temple at Tellippalai. She voluntered to do so. It is now over 15 years and she is still waiting for a husband. The family is now displaced and the girl now lives in Colombo in a hotel with her younger sister and brother, the rest of the family members are in Canada.,She has now changed her venue to the Mayurapathy Amman temple about two miles from where the hotel is. She visits this temple every Tuesday and continues to request the goddess for a husband. In addition to this fasting. She also performs the task of *adi alithhal*, a special form of homage paid to the goddess, where the devotee goes round the inner courtyard on their knees, bends her head and touches the ground with her forehead and then takes a few steps in the forward direction and continues the same task until the full circle is completed. She is still hopeful that her boy friend who is in France will come to marry her or take her to France. The boy has still not done it. The picture is more complicated, for the boy, a neighbour never knew this one sided love and is having a family of his own. This information reached me from a friend of hers. But she simply does not admit this and refused to marry those eligible young men arranged by the parents. She is still waiting for a husband.

Case E: A young girl from Sithankerny, a village to the South-East about six miles from the Durga temple, aged twenty eight, Convent educated, no job and looking for a husband. The girl is attractive, but has no father. The mother had used all the wealth to get her three elder daughters married. Even the brothers elder to this girl are married, none of them care for the mother or the sister anymore. The mother was unable to give her in marriage for want of a dowry. The girl however has no planetary afflictions. The worried mother accompanied the daughther to the Durga temple, and they observed the new ritual. When I interviewed this girl, it was six months after she had observed the ritual, and within this time her mother's brother had volounteered to accept her as his daughter-in-law to be married to his son, now in Germany. They were planning to travel to India and have the wedding ceremony, where the groom will join them.

Case F: A girl in her mid twenties from the village of Kadduvan, the mother is mentally sick, father deserted the family when she was quite young. She was brought up by her maternal grand mother. Her elder brother employed as a clerk in Colombo supported the family. The girl having Mars afflictions was advised by the grand mother to go with her friends to Durga temple to observe the Tuesday rituals. Every Tuesday she traveled with her friends in a *thatti* van, a half lorry restructured for human transport. Being a smart and talkative girl she became friendly with the conductor of the van and eventually left the custody of her grand mother to marry him. It was three years after this incident that I happened to meet her at the temple, she remaked that she visits the temple in gratitude every Tuesday for giving her a loving husband and for having accept her back into the family, by the grand mother.

Case G: A lady thirty eight years old, married, from Tellippalai claims Durga as her *Kula Theivam*, guardian goddess of the clan. Her house is only two hundred yards from the temple. She said that her mother is a regular visitor, but that she started coming to the temple only after the success of her marriage. From then on she has become a regular visitor to the temple on all festival days. She initially made a *nerti* asking for a husband, her horoscope shows Mars affliction in the eighth house and it is this she believed delayed her marriage, it should be noted that her expectations of the husband to be are also peculiar, she wanted a husband who is a teatotaler, a vegetarian of suitable age and with a pleasing personality, holding a job and above all should be prepared to live in Tellippalai itself. She was earlier proposed to her cousin who demanded a large dowry. He was a farmer and he was not prepared to look after her parents, his mother was also ill mannered she refused to marry him, and the parents did not want to force her. The relatives and neighbours were angry and they remarked that she will never find a husband. It is at this stage she put her all *pali* (place all responsibilities) on Durga and observed *Gowri Viratham*, a special fasting. She married within one year from the time of her fasting. The groom's chart was introduced by a relative, he has Mars affliction in the twelfth house. He hails from Kopay. The man demanded a dowry, but accepted whatever was given to her, in addition he accepted to look after her parents and aunt.

It is interesting to note here she now lived in Kopay in her husband's *Muthisa* (ancestoral) house. The husband is a farmer and looks after the family property, but she is contended. She is confident that the goddess who helped her to find a good husband will also bless her husband in getting a job.

Case H: A male devotee, retired co-operative inspector also from Tellippalai went to the goddess to undo a wrong done to him. The government had taken

away his land and he appealed to the goddess, subsequently, he received as compensation fairly a large sum of money which he believes is the gift of the goddess. He is an outspoken man and said that it is the women who come in large numbers to this temple but not men. He lost his wife, no children and thus he faced no forbidden days and is able to come to the temple on all three hundred and sixty five days of the year. While many of the devotees had no idea about the new face of the goddess, this man had his own explanation, to give and according to him Ambal appears in the *ghora* form to the bad people and in the *Satvic* form to the good ones.

Case I: A divorced lady in her mid forties from a wealthy and influential family, married at the age of 25. Her husband is a popular psychiatrist who practices in Colombo, but her marriage turned out to be a failure and ended up in a divorce. The parents were conscious about her and particularly about the public image created by this. They tried every effort to give her in marriage but this turned out to be a failure. Everything else failing they had no alternative but go to the gods for help. The anxious mother made a *nerti* to the Goddess Durga, and I met the family at the Durga temple after the lady's second marriage.

Case J: A lady in her early fifties with a son in his teens came every Tuesday to the temple. Here the purpose of her visit is rather different. She answered with tears that it was Durga as mother goddess who had saved her son. We is a very intelligent student and attending Advanced Level class in one of the leading schools in Jaffna. A few months back, he was taken into custody by the armed forces. The helpless mother having no one to plead for her, placed her case at the feet of the goddess. To everyone's surprise, the boy was released from custody nearly after a year. Since then, the mother visits the temple every Tuesday, accompanied by her son. After this incident the mother never permitted her son to go anywhere on his own. The family originally lived in Colombo, but after this incident had returned to Kondavil their native place.

Healers of Tellippalai Durga

Amongst the devotees who come to this temple a few need special mention and they include those who are possessed and function as healers of Durga.

They have their own shrines to attract people, while others move from place to place as visiting healers. In this regard, two typical samples are given below:

I. Mood Master-Victor Rajadurai

Mood Master is a Catholic, lived a very happy religious life, but after his marriage things changed for the worse, became very unhappy and is worried about his future. It was about this time that a long time friend visited him. Victor discussed the problems confronting him. The friend anxious to help Victor, told him of the experience he had while in India and advised him to place all his problems at the feet of the goddess, who is the only one who can be of help. Victor took this advise very seriously and left for his first visit to the temple of Durga at Tellippalai. He narrated his experiences as follows:

"On a Tuesday in the month of May, I left for Tellippalai, but my journey was uncomfortable and I wondered what sort of an experience awaited me. When I reached *Durgapuram*, I plucked courage and prepared myself for the event. From the main road itself I was able to see the beautiful *kopuram* standing majestic against the blue sky. Even from the outer courtyard I was able to have a glimpse of the goddess residing in the sanctum sanctorum. As I reached the *kopura Vasal*, I saw a strange looking and unusually tall lady seated in the middle of *kopuram* with her long legs spread out across to the right and left of the *kopurum*. She was dressed in a yellow sarie, she wore a matching blouse. She had a blood-red coloured large *kumkum pottu*, in the center of her extra large forehead. When I looked up, I could see her staring at me. She had her long matted hair tied in two plaits."

The *kopuram* was decorated with beautiful images of gods and goddesses referred to in the *Puranas* on each of the nine gateways of the *kopuram* was placed a crown.

As I reached the main gateway and was about to enter the inner courtyard, saw the priest offering *Vipoothy* and *prasatham* to the devotees. At the further end of the main entrance, towards the Sanctum Sanctorum stood a lady who appeared very impressive and later I came to know her as Thangammah Appacuddy, the lady who is said to be the person behind the rise of Durga as a popular deity.

I looked at the kopuram once again and saw the lady I referred to earlier, climbing to the top of the *kopuram*, I was frightened and walked towards the sanctum sanctorum. Inside the shrine room, I saw an image of Durga dressed in a green skirt and blouse to match with garlands round her neck. Her bright eyes stared at me, in fear I turned behind, to my horror I saw the figure trying to jump down, she did this in a moment and broke to pieces. In utter fear, I turned towards the sanctum sanctorum and begged of her to protect me. I closed my eyes and stood for

a moment, before I could even realize what had happened, I felt someone pulling me by the hair and hitting me on the back of my body."

He said that it was the goddess herself who came out of the Sanctum Sanctorum and gave him this fearful welcome. He fell on the ground and became unconscious. Thangammah seeing this, sprinkled holy water on his face, it took some time for him to recover from this shock. The people in the temple offered to take him, but he choose to return on his push bike which he found a herculean task particularly, after the bitter experiences he underwent that day. The journey to Mallakam, the adjoining village, about half a mile from the temple took him more than two hours, when he reached the Palam Pillayar temple he could proceed no further and so he decided to rest for a while. He slept and in his sleep had a dream.

In this dream, the figure of the same lady appeared and offered him a golden sword. He was scared and did not accept it. The lady full of anger shouted at him to get up from his long sleep, and pulled him by his shirt sleeve. Out of sheer fear, he begged of her to forgive him. She ordered him to go with her which he did until they reached the temple garden. Here the lady gave him grapes to eat and offered him the sword again, which he now accepted but with reluctance. At this time the lady appeared to him as the goddess Durga herself, exactly as she appears in the *vimanam* of the main shrine room at Tellippalai. When they returned to the front entrance of the temple, to his surprise, saw his wife drawing water from the temple well. The goddess pointed at her and ordered him to cut her into two with his sword. He refused to obey and stood still, he remained in the same state in spite of several commands from her. She ordered him to return the sword if he was not going to obey his command, which he did, the goddess placed the sword within the gold case meant for it, tied the same around her waist. She now looked upon Victor and remarked that she wanted to try him and that he had faced all her tests, she was pleased and as such he may return home without any worry and disappeared. But no sooner he took a step in the direction of the outward journey. She ordered him to turn back, Victor was angry and began to curse the friend who introduced him to Durga.

Mood Master is quite popular among the many devotees who know him, and his predictions are very well received. The devotees go to him mainly for marital reasons, and those who have their family members missing which indeed is an acute problem in the war torn Jaffna of today. One such typical case was recorded by one of my students and the recording translated read as follows:

Vicky returned

Vicky is missing for a number of days. The worried and anxious parents approach many sooth sayers to find about their son's whereabouts, the answer to their questions is as follows;

"The position of the planets of your son, at present is not good, when this changes he will definitely come."

This began to drain their money but no answer was found, money had to be given not only to the sooth sayers but also to the temple rituals like *kiraka santhi* which means pleasing the planets to calm down.

About this time, relations were criticizing them, but in fact they had approached all available sooth sayers. The days increased to months, the son did not return, and they began to loose all hopes, it is at this juncture that a relative of theirs referred them to Mood Master.

"There is a person called Mood Master a born Catholic, is now possessed by Durga Amman and in trance he is able to foretell everything. I will give him your Address, with Durgas permission, he will visit you."

Nearly after he was at their door step and introduced himself and said,

"As according to the word of Durga, your son is in a place where he is happy, he has no problems as you think. Because of a mistake made by someone else, and in order that they may escape, brought Vicky into trouble. In about 15 days, your son will come to you. At present, he is suffering from some minor illness, and he will come"

On the eleventh day morning, Vicky was at the door step and said that he had come to see them on his way to the hospital. The parents could not believe it, even thought whether it was God who had come in the form of their son.

After this incident, a friendship developed between Vicky's parents and the Master. They gave him money and other facilities, but Master was reluctant to accept this and said that he was acting on the word of the goddess. Following this, Master used to come and give a tentative date for the son's return. Just as predicted, the son would visit the parents and return. For three months there was no master nor the son. Master appeared again at the door step on a Tuesday morning and said that on Thursday their son will come and spend a few days with them. The interviewer and the family

members waited on that particular Thursday (9.12.1993), they were all excited for Vicky was going to be with them for three days. The boy came, the parents were anxious to know when he would return permanently and when Master was asked, he said, "I have not seen Vicky. I must look at your son's palm to answer this question", and he volunteered to meet him at the hospital, he said, "when the boy returns, those who put him into difficulty will be punished". The boy returned after a long time though not on the said date.

Predictions of Mood Master

The following account chiefly relate to the incidents that occurred, about which he had much ahead of time. These interviews will be reported in direct speech exactly as related by Mood Master.

1. In relation to Kilali incidents: "One day I went to the temple and I asked the management to give me a job. There was firewood in front of the house of the Priest. I asked for an axe to chop the firewood. As I turned over a large log to position it before chopping, saw a number of Cobras beneath the log and they crawled away. A few minutes after I started chopping the snakes crawled again under the log and were caught within the axe and were cut into pieces. Durga, the daughter of the Priest tried to pick them up with her hands. At this time the Priest came he asked me what I was thinking about. I said 'there is trouble in the East of Jaffna. 'Are these people militance winning' he asked me. I answered 'the army will not come interior, but will go thirty yards backward'.

2. In relation to Thangammah Appacuddy:

Immediately after the *puja* was over, I was at the house of the Priest, one of the orphan girls from Thangammah Appacuddy's orphanage wanted to find out about her future from me. Looking at her I said, "In education you are like a spring, you have a good future. Next, the child asked about her marriage. I was holding her palm and examining, when suddenly ammah appeared, she in an angry voice remarked, 'the administration does not like *sastra*, possessed dancing etc., do not do these here, if you like, you can have them elsewhere.' I did not say anything at this time because it was rude to talk back to our elders, more over I thought I shall let her know my *shakti* at the right time, but I said to her this is not Kuruvi Sastra (bird sastra where a pet bird picks up a card with a prediction, this is read out by the sastrakara) but the word of sakti. After this I stopped prediting at the temple.

Inspite of this, whenever the priest met me, he always asked whether there were any other incidents. I would like to refer to just one of them.

"One night along the outer courtyard on the southern side was a lady in a green sarie. She was surrounded by a number of devotees, and a few others who threw mud at her. I looked very carefully at each one of them, all of them had a thread tied round their wrist except one who was without the thread. If this is not fulfilled, there is going to be a third attack. I looked. The lady in the green sarie was no other than the temple head, Thangammah Appacuddy. I was so frightened that I asked the goddess to protect all including the Priest and the President of the temple, Thangammah Appacuddy herself.

When I asked for more details about this incident, he said that during the first and the second occasion when the temple was bombed, the President escaped, but to escape the third time also was difficult. This is really due to those associated with the temple. He further referred to earlier incident where mud at the lady was thrown protesting against the low wages paid to them. He further added that he had often heard the President talking at the temple during puja time that they have everything that is needed for the temple and that they need only plantain leaves and teak leaves to be used as plates. If this is so and if she has enough money, why does she not offer good wages for those who work for the temple he asked.

Comment

The significant feature here is the possession of Durga by a catholic. His conception is expressed in the idiom of dreams which are part of the Psychological experiences of those possessed. This is a common phenomenon amongst the possesed person as Obeysekere (1977) pointed out.

This divine healer was however rejected by the temple management. As a consequence he had no place in the temple of Durga and had to find abode in places elsewhere to attend to the calls of his clients. This conflict between the management and the healer is reflected in the predictions he made in reference to Thangammah.

'Further the gradge priest had over the income received by the temple is evident from the predictions he made and the interest the priest showed for the other employees of the temple.'

However, for his very existence he can neither break away from the temple or the Goddess Durga.

II. Amman Dharmabawani

Dharmabawani from *Atchchuvely*, a village about 5 miles from Tellippalai Durga temple is like Mood Master possessed by Durga and attract a large number of devotees to come here for many purposes. She has a small shrine in her residence satisfy the needs of her devotees.

Dharmabawani, aged 35, is from one of the intermediate caste group, *Koviyar*, and her father is a school teacher. Her family is large with nine children, seven girls and two boys. She spent her early childhood with her aunt who lived in Kaddaipirai, another village about six miles from Atchchuvely. Even her aunt could not help her to continue with her studies and so had to go for classes in the neighbouring village of Puttur. From here she was selected for training at the Thavady weaving centre. At this centre, she met one Ganeshalingam a business man and fell in love with him. The young man hails from the *Vellala* caste and was quite wealthier compared to her family. The parents of the young man objected to the marriage but in spite of the objection, they married in 1981.

The young couple chose to live in Thavady. The husband's mother lived in Tellippalai and looked after the small family property they owned. Suddenly Ganeshalingam's mother fell ill and they both left for Tellippalai on a push-bike to see the sick lady, when they reached Maruthanamadam junction on Jaffna K.K.S. road the bicycle tyre went flat, when they reached Durga temple it was midnight, and they stopped for a while to pray.

It was from this moment that her life began to show changes and she remarked.

> "I had a heavy suitcase in one hand and raised only the other hand as a mark of respect, suddenly I felt as if someone pulled me by the hair from the top of my head I was frightened and could not take a step further. Holding to the shirt sleeve of my husband, managed to reach my mother-in-law's house".

Here she found her mother-in-law recovered from a cramp. Since this day Dharmabawani continued to suffer from some illness or the other, and she was taken to all the nearby hospitals for treatment. One day out of sheer depression, she removed all her jewels. She suddenly entered into a stage of coma and remained in this stage for fourteen days and on the fifteenth day, her mother came to nurse her, but in the absence of any response to medicine the mother put her entire faith on *Murikandy Pillaiar* (a wayside temple on the Jaffna - Kandy road, about 45 miles from the Jaffna town. This is a famous temple, and no one dare to travel along this route

without stopping for a moment to pray) and begged him to bring back her daughter to normal state, and she applied the holy ash which she had brought with her from Murikandy. The helpless mother even had a long argument with her son-in-law about the plight of her daughter. About this time Dharmabawani entered into a trance and became possessed of the goddess.

She requested those closeby to wash the room to purify it and immediately began to predict to those who were there. Following this, heated arguments took place between her husband and her mother. Ganeshalingam's mother accused the mother of Dharmabawani for having cheated them and forced the son to marry a possessed lady. Likewise the mother of Bawani accused Ganeshalingam for bringing her daughter into the present plight. The husband's people brought a Priest who applied the holy ash and tied the sacred thread, but this did not help and she became restless.

Immediately after these incidents, they moved to Atchchuvely, after having sold the husband's property. They put up a shed for Durga and a small house for them in the land given to them by her mother. By this time the news had spread that Durga had moved from Tellippalai to Atchchuvely. In fact, Thangammah had even sent her Secretary to check on this. The number of devotees attending this temple began to increase, and it became necessary for them to expand the temple.

The husband and wife jointly worked together to build a house for them and a temple for the goddess. They bought the adjacent land for this purpose, but this plot was long and narrow and most unsuitable for construction work. They were unable to find a suitable *nilayam* (site for the house according to astrology) for the construction. In the midst of this, one day she in trance, asked for a pencil and paper and drew the plan of the house with a long corridor, facing west. The construction work on the house and the temple were completed in 1985 in a mere six months period. The statue for the temple was donated by a devotee who was on an earlier occasion was cured of her illness by '*Amman*'.

The temple though small, celebrated all the annual festivals for Durga, however, Tuesdays and Fridays are treated as special days, and '*sathiram*' (forecasting) is told on Tuesday, the lamp is lit at 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on all other days.

After this, her family life was smooth and she had three boys, however she was anxious to have a female child, but being unsuccessful, she consoled herself as this being her fate. About this time, the husband left for Switzerland and her sister to Middle-East. The sister donated three sovereigns to the temple, and the husband sent rupees thirty five thousand with his first earning. Out of this, rupees twenty

thousand was given to Tellippallai Durga, rupees five thousand to Murikandy and rupees ten thousand to the other temples.

During this time, Bawani spent nearly two years in India, visiting all the temples and spent most of her time at Madurai Meenadchchi Amman temple. There too she entered into trance on several occasions and began predicting to those who came to her. She returned to Sri Lanka and continued with her temple activities, and her predictions are is presently concerned with the following;

1. Solving love affairs and match making, particularly the safe journey of a prospective bride to a foreign land for her subsequent marriage.
2. Tying of the sacred thread for protection.
3. Providing protection to houses, as Atchchuvely is closer to the Army barrier.

Devotees throng to the temple from all over the Peninsula.

Amman Bawani, interviews the clients within the premises of the main deity. The shrine room is quite small and the clients are called in one by one. (Plate 2.1)

When the prediction is being given, the door is also kept closed, so that anyone outside will not be able to know the proceedings taking place within the shrine room.

A young girl in her early twenties was the client and as she walked to the deity, *Amman* talked to her and I recorded the conversation. I must also record here that the *Amman* gave me permission to take photographs. Using this opportunity, I managed to take position in the corner of the shrine room, a vantage position from where I was able to follow the process in detail and recorded the conversation between the clients and the *Amman* Bawani.

Amman: You have come here with three problems, isn't it?

Client: Yes, I have suffered with these problems for the last three and a half years.

Amman: Don't worry, now close your eyes, think of a number within five. Now say with closed eyes. The number is given as three.

Amman: Now open your eyes and see, Amman has written this number in the holy ash. See it for yourself.

Everything will be alright for you and by April seventeenth all your problems will be solved.

She now takes the holy ash and apply it on the forehead of the client and remarked "*Kallangathaieddi*" (close language. meaning not to worry).

Amman: Have you any more problems?

Client's answer was in the negative, and she leaves the place with full of gratitude.

The next client is also a young girl who also walked into the shrine room when her name was called out.

Amman: You must be having about three problems in your mind. Which is worrying you? Give me your name and birth star.

Amman: After June 19th 1995, your first request will be fulfilled. Now the planet Ragu is looking at Kethu, this is affecting you. But don't give up hope, however you should be very careful and watchful. Do a *puja* to *Thedchanamoorthy* (*Siva* in the mediation form). This should be performed on the day of your birthday, and remember to use yellow flowers.

She now instructs the client to close her eyes and holding her hand asked whether it was the right or the left hand. The client says right hand, and true enough, flowers were there in the right hand of the *Amman*.

Amman: Your wishes will be fulfilled.

She takes the holy ash and apply it on the forehead of the client.

Amman: Everything will be alright, "onrukkum kalankathaieddy"
(Meaning don't worry about anything)
Any more questions?

The girl shook her head and left the place.

The next client was a lady, fourty five years, who came to the shrine room with tears in the eyes, the Amman looked at her and said:

Amman: You have come and is concerned about a 'life'.

Client shook her head to indicate.

Amman: "Nee *vethanaipadathaieddy*" (don't worry for anything).
Ambal says she will succeed.

A young girl is trying to separate you, and she has mesmerized your child. *Ambal* will give success before the month of April.

The women sobbing said that its her daughter who had run away, it appeared she had not grasped all that *Amman* had said earlier.

Amman: Your child will certainly come to you, she is safe, she will come again, she is in the East, she will come before April seventeenth, these are convicing words from *Ambal*.

The woman sobbing repeatedly asked for the date and the direction. *Amman* consoled her and applied holy ash and giving a small packet of holy ash remarked.

Amman: Your daughter will come. In the mean time apply the holy ash daily.

A further cross-section of the devotees who come to this shrine have been studied, and typical samples are given as case studies.

Case A: Mrs Saras, 40 year old, a regular devotee. Bawani herself requested me to talk to this client and find out from her the grace of the goddess acting through her.

She is a mother of two boys and one girl. Initially she was a regular devotee of Tellippalai Durga and had observed fasting on seven consecutive Tuesday. In 1986 she lost one of her sons in a shell attack from Palali. Since then she had stopped going to Tellippalai and stopped wearing the pottu, a symbol of fullness. Subsequently she was not able to find a solution to her daughters love affair. It was in this temple that she found solution and since then she became a devotee of Atchchuvely Durga. The girl's lover had left for foreign employment in 1985, he failed to keep his word and failed even to write to her. The worried mother approached Bawani and requested her to find a solution to her problems. The request was granted and Bawani gave a date and said that the daughter's marriage will take place within the said date, and true to her word the marriage took place in 1992. This was convincingly stated by Saras herself.

The second son was also abroad and there were no letters for a long time from him too. When Bawani was approached she said "your son has moved to a new place, and once he settled down he will write to you". This prediction was also fulfilled.

Case B: A youth, thirty two years of age, from Point Pedro, owner of a cycle repair shop. He is worried about the delay in his marriage. He has been a devotee of Tellippalai Durga for a long time, but the present disturbed conditions has prevented him for going to Tellippalai, since then he is a regular devotee of the Atchchuvely Durga. Recently four horoscopes have been given to choose from for him, he said, "This is the grace of Amman Bawani, she has been to India, and has refused to join her husband in Switzerland for the sake of us".

Case C: Usha, thirty nine years old, unmarried, family of four girls, two elder sisters and one younger to her. She became a devotee of Durga in the last two years. Her devotion started with her problem of marriage, but she has still not given up hopes. When she came to this temple, Bawani asked her about her worries and she continued "Amman is aware of your problem". Saying this she would predict a date within which time all her problems would be solved. She always adviced her clients to come back to her if the prediction did not materialize. On the second visit she would give a new date and in addition would put all the blame on the planetary position of her clients.

Case D: Sister of Usha, thirty two years old, also a devotee for the last two years. She has also come for her marriage problem. The parents of the boy did not like this marriage. The girl came to Bawani one morning and she predicted that her wedding will take place on a particular day at a given time. She left the temple happily. The boy also came to Bawani in the evening, and she told him that her girl was there in the morning, and predicted the time when they will be married. They left home and were married without the parent's blessings. However, now the two families are united, and as predicted a child was born in a nearby hospital at Atchchuvely. Since then, she and her husband are strong devotees of Amman.

Case E: Vimala, a student, aged 18 is to be married to a boy in a foreign country, however she is unable to get the pass to leave Jaffna (At present no one within the age of 13 - 30 will be able to leave Jaffna). When she visisted the temple on the first day, she was asked to bring a bottle of coconut oil. She brought this on her second visit, and is hopeful that her wishes will be fulfilled.

Case F: Susila, aged fourty three years, a devotee since 1988, a regular visitor asking for a child. A son was born as said in 1990, and after this she, gave one by fourth of a sovereign of gold to Tellippalai Durga as requested by Amman Bawani. She became sick after child birth, and since then, has stopped going to the temple. She was cured after Amman gave holy ash, but when she went to the temple she was asked to pay Rs. 201/-. After that the she had stopped going to the temple now. Her husband is employed in a foreign country and all her problems have vanished.

Case G: Rathy, aged 35, educated up to grade eight, a labourer. A strong devotee since the inception of the temple. She had a number of family problems, and the Amman foretold that she will overcome all these problems. In the mid 80s her mother fell sick and suffered from breathing problems. She thought that the mother's illness must be a kind of sorcery, and fully believed that Amman will cure her, and in fact Amman had answered that there was no danger to her life. She decided to fast

for seven Tuesdays but on the sixth day, the mother died and after that had not gone to the temple.

Case H : Jeya, aged twenty six, from the Dhoby caste, Puttur, has no father but six brothers and one sister. She had come to this temple with her friends since 1988. She had a love affair and was worried. The *Amman* had blessed her and said that she should not worry for anything and everything will be alright for her. The boy's parents however were not happy with this marriage as the girl's people had no money or property to give as dowry. In the meantime the boy married elsewhere and left the country. Even after this Amman had given hopes of her marriage to the same boy. Having lost faith, she has now stopped going to the temple.

Case I: Thavam, aged twenty eight, elder sister of the above said, Jaya, married in 1990. She always consulted Amman before doing anything. The husband had no job, he is thirty six years old, however *Amman* had promised that he will get a job, and now is working in a toffee factory. This job, the husband had obtained within six months as predicted by *Amman*. Her worry now is for a child, although *Amman* had predicted on two occasions she is yet to have a child. She unlike her sister continues to have full faith in Amman. She was also quite hurt over her sister's attitude.

Case J: Mathy, aged 35, also with love problems, she had come to the temple since 1982. The boy whom she loved evaded marriage. Having no alternative, she went to *Amman* who foretold that everything will be alright but within a short time of this prediction the boy was married to another girl. Mathy has now stopped going to the temple.

Case K: Revathy, forty five years, married in 1991 to a widower. She is not very happy about this and to make it worse although *Amman* predicted the birth of a boy, she was blessed with a female child. She does not go to the temple as before, she is not able to believe in the Amman anymore, but does not want to admit it openly, therefore she puts all the blame on the time factor for not attending the temple.

Comments

The conversion of patients into priest is a continuous process and she is an example of this.

As far as her predictions are concerned she deals mainly with hopes given to clients. She particularly deals with love affairs and marriages.

Strict privacy is maintained when she foretells to her clients.Bavani is one of the first women to become possessed by Tellippalai Durga. Here too the expressions are in the cultural idioms of dreams.

Bawani also has conflicts with the temple administration but since she has established a temple of her own, there was no control by any one from Durga temple of Tellippalai.

5.2 Satellite Durga Temples in Jaffna

There were no separate temples for the Goddess Durga prior to mid 1970s. This situation has changed dramatically in Jaffna and from here it has spread to many parts of the country. Even in areas where a separate Durga temple is not available, small shrine rooms have been constructed for this popular goddess and her image is propitiated in these shrines. This has become necessary to cater to the needs of the increasing number of devotees of all age groups from all parts of the country.

In Jaffna today there are about ten satellite temples which have sprung up in the last five to ten years. The main Durga temple is the one at Tellippalai. A few of these satellite temples are described here. These will illustrate the expansion and popularity of the Goddess Durga in Sri Lanka.

1. Konavalai Sai Durga Temple - Kokkuvil

Origin and Development

This temple is located very close to the Medical Faculty of Jaffna University in Konavalai, Kokkuvil. In the beginning, the goddess in the form of a Trident was placed under a margosa tree in a tiny unimpressive building. The trident represented the Goddess *Kali*. Very close to this temple is the Vairavar temple. Both these are famous for animal sacrifice. A person makes a vow for a specific wish. When the request is granted a animal is sacrificed.

A person who wishes to take revenge on an enemy will pay the priest some cash and have an animal slaughtered. Sacrifices are generally made at the *Kali* temple and the slaughtered body carried to the main temple for offering. The people living in the surrounding are still scared to come to this temple site, particularly in the nights. In the 1960s more people began to colonize this area. It was about this time that *Kali achchi* who settled in this area began to take care of the temple. She cleaned the temple surrounding and began to light a small *thundamani villakku* (small brass lamp). It was she who took the initiative to place a *takara* (tin) sheet over the

goddess as a protection against rain. She received the help of one Kandasamy *Appa* in attending to the temple activities. When the devotees began to increase in number it became necessary for them to construct a small shrine room for the goddess they patronized. She raised the funds necessary for this from the public. The premises in which the temple is sited belongs to one Thambiah and he donated a plot of land, thirty feet by thirty feet for the purpose of constructing this temple. In return, he demanded that a committee be set up and that his family members should be always given the post of the president and the secretary, and that the committee members be elected once a year. *Kali achchi* was helped by one Thulasihamani from Valvettiturai, but resident of Kokkuvil the manager of the Raja Icecream House and a popular cigar merchant. Once the construction work was over the first *kumbaabishekam* was held. Just before this, Thulasihamani suggested that the temple be named as Sai Durga temple, *Kali achchi* was very offended over the new name and other devotees too did not favour this suggestion and some of them even suggested that the temple be named as Raja Rajeswary Amman temple. In view of the dispute in naming the temple, it was planned to have a draw to select the name, Thulasihamani won and the temple came to be named as Sai Durga temple. But many of them felt that Thulasihamani must have cheated them by writing Sai Durga on all the chits. This view was reflected in my interviews. Even Thangammah Appacuddy who was specifically invited to grace the occasion was very displeased over the name selected. As a result, immediately after *Kumbaabishekam*, the number of devotees coming to the temple declined. However, none of them could do anything, because Thulasihamani had helped in many ways. Kandasamy *appa* and many others believed that Thulasihamani being a Sai Baba devotee wanted to name the temple as Sai Durga. He was even keen to place a framed picture of Sai Baba in the temple, but it was, totally rejected by all. Any how, the temple developed into a place of importance.

The deity in the sanctum sanctorum, is "*Vishnu Durga*," in the seated position. On the *Vimanam* above this and in front is Durga in the *Bhoga* form, and behind is the *ghora* form. The images on the right side of the *Vimanam* represent the marriage of Siva and Parvati, with Vishnu giving away the bride, his sister to Siva. The young devotees of marriageable age pray in front of this for partners.

The Temple administration organizes and conducts religious discourses, Group bajans, meetings in relation to religious matters, and discussion on ancient Hindu civilization at the temple premises. The temple administration is very keen to maintain the old *Agamic* traditions and therefore prevent and safeguard the temple from any actions against this.

The Committee which runs the administration of the Temple are life members with eligibility to vote. Persons donating rupees one thousand at a time or more within a year will be considered as life members of the Committee with voting powers. Each year, the secretary of the committee prepares a list of members including those who are in foreign countries. However, during the time of voting, the total number of votes will be taken, excluding the members in foreign countries.

The constitution of the Temple administration included the following conditions:

Committee selected to administrate the temple will hold eleven members, of which Mr A. C. Velayuthapillai who donated his land to construct the temple will be the President, and Mr P Nadarasa as Vice President, and Mr K Thulasihamani, who served the temple right along will serve as Secretary. The other eight members will be elected by the public at an annual general meeting, out of which four members will hold other posts and four will be ordinary members of the Committee. The persons elected should not and cannot serve in other Temple Committees within the Kokuvil area and if they do so, their memberships from the Committee will be canceled and other persons will be elected in their places.

In case, if the above mentioned three life members who hold the posts of President, Vice-President, and Secretary resigns from these posts, or on their demise, their eldest son will take over the post, respectively. If these persons do not have any males in the family, then the eldest girl will be entitled to hold the post respectively. These persons have their discretion to nominate a person from the caste they belong to their post, if they so desired.

In case, if the eldest sons of the above persons are under age, the committee of the Temple Trustees has the power to elect a member to the post of President/Vice-President or Secretary, to function in the Committee temporarily, until such time as the heir become of age.

If the heirs of the above life members do not wish to accept the posts of President/Vice President/Secretary, then the Trustees of the Temple have the power to elect the members to the above posts.

The priest of the Temple will be appointed by the Administrative Committee of the Temple. The Committee will appoint a *Brahmin* competent in *Saiva Vedic* and *Agamic* rules and regulations with an exemplary record of religious activities and with a good background and character as the priest of the temple. The priest will be in-charge of all movable and immovable items of the temple. (By Law

of Sai Durga Temple, 1986).

Temple administration is more or less identical to that at Tellippalai Durga and devotees started coming in large numbers particularly on Tuesdays, the day suitable for the propitiation of the deity Durga. In order to cater to this increasing numbers the temple was expanded. The goddess is now rich with a lot of jewelry. This is all made from *thali pottu* offered by the devotees. This is a reflection of the efficient administration of the temple. The manager of temple now is one Nithiananthan, an employee of the Paranthan Chemicals, and a brother-in-law of Mr Thambiah. The factory being closed due to war situation, he devotes full time to temple activities. The secretary is also a new comer (Thulasihamani having emigrated in search of employment) a wholesale vegetable dealer at the Thirunellvely super market, only a mile or two from the temple. Kandasamy *Appa* is now a permanent employee of the temple, they say that he was not considered to be elected to the executive committee due to his inability to read or write. He is paid a mere sum of Rs. 500/- per month for the services rendered. Another boy employed on a part time basis is given the responsibility of selling *archanai* tickets at the entrance. The administration is keen to expand further they have the money for this but no land is available near the temple.

Table 5.10

Details of Temple Collections-Sai Durga-1985-92

	Archanai	*Undiyal*	*Puja*	Donation of Goods (Value)
1985	Money given to the Priest	5,319.00	517.75	-
1986	51,348,00	9,347.75	-	-
1987	107,942.00	13,721.90	1,533.00	-
1989	170,492.00	15,037.90	-	66,777.65
1990	183,033.00	12,821.59	-	-
1991	188,703.00	18,338.15	39.00	-
1992	242,711.00	19,724.50	45.00	-

Source: Temple annual reports, Sai Durga.

Although the temple administration is doing a very good service in the development of the temple there is no contribution towards social work as in Tellippalai and, its

attitude to castism has not changed very much. This is reflected in the manner in which they dealt with Thangamanie, an old time devotee, but of the depressed caste group. He laboured very hard during the initial stages, especially in the construction work. The previous management realizing his services gave him due recognition and gave him the honour of holding the umbrella over the head of the deity while she is taken in procession.

The present management, particularly without Thulasihamani removed the privilege given to Thangamanie and right of serving meals on the day of *annathanam*. Thangamani, with the help of a young relative of him protested against this. In order to diffuse the crisis, he is now given the responsibility of controlling the crowd that come to the temple.

The present priest is a holder of a degree in Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Jaffna and a young handsome personality. However, during important festival days, a more experienced priest is invited from *Annaikodai*, another village about 3 miles in distance from the temple.

As far as the worship patterns are concerned it may be said that what takes place here is a duplication of the Durga temple at Tellippalai. It is worth pointing out that in spite of the development of the temple followed by sanskritization and a new deity being installed, the people have not forgotten the earlier deity, and many of the devotees continue to perform the lime lighting ceremony in front of the original Kali shrine under the margosa tree.

The richness of the temple is reflected in the manner in which the devotees demand to give them the *ubayam* (one who stands the cost of a given festival). At present the *ubayakarar* are requested to register their names with the temple and the person who bears the cost of the festival is selected as per the order of registration.

Travelling in Jaffna in the 80s and 90s developed into an almost difficult task, and devotees were scared to travel to Tellippalai, and hence chose to conduct their rituals in a nearby temple. This has certainly contributed to the sudden emergence of this temple as a popular place of worship and this was confirmed by a number of devotees whom I interviewed.

The devotees coming to the temple on special days have increased to five hundred or even more and they are from all walks of life, typical of a semi town in Sri Lanka. The following table illustrates the distribution of devotees and their problems.

Table 5.11

The Distribution of Devotees & their Problems of the sample of five hundred

Percentage of persons visiting for Specific Purposes		
Marital needs	-	52%
Exams	-	17%
Employment-inland	-	04%
foreign	-	08%
Business	-	12%
Illness		
Infectious diseases	-	01%
Others	-	06%

Source: Field survey

Few typical case studies from the devotees of this temple are given below.

Case A : Kali *Achchi*, aged sixty five from Karainagar (One of the Northern Island), now living in Kokkuvil, husband is a hardware merchant.

This lady has been here from the time the Goddess Kali was worshipped under the margosa tree, represented by a trident. She has been maintaining the place and lighting the lamp. She is the one who took the first initiative to construct a building for the goddess. She is proud that there is a modern building now, but unhappy over the naming of the main deity. Therefore, she continues to worship the original Kali. However, she is not against the new goddess either. But her children are devotees of the Goddess Durga.

Case B: Male, tobacco agent, aged seventy from Kokkuvil a neighbouring village.

According to him the temple was popular as a place for animal sacrifice. He says as many as thousand goats may have been sacrificed on special days. Since the Kali temple and the *Vairavar* temple belong to the same person (Thambipillai), animals were sacrificed here, and only blood was taken to the *Vairavar* temple for offering. With the ban on animal sacrifices, this practice, was stopped here too. He added,

"When Thambipillai's grand child fell ill, law was broken and three goats were sacrificed".

This, he says was very wrong and feel that law must be same for all. While talking about the naming of the goddess, he says, Thulasihamany's popularity and

political position helped in this. He was like Kali *achchi* quite hurt about the name given to the goddess. He also criticized Sai Baba and reffered to him as a *Kuralivithaikaran* (black magician) He laughed at the idea of *holy* ash pouring from the framed picture of Sai Baba. He further says that Sai Baba is fooling the people all over the world, and in Kokkuvil Thulasihamany is repeating it. The administration of the temple, he says is efficient and the present growth and popularity of the goddess is due to this administration. He had all praises for the new worship pattern. This, he says, is useful. It helps many to find their partners in life, and get employment. He says,

> "My grand daugther was able to get a foreign husband (Canada) by coming to the temple regularly on Tuesdays and performing the lime light ritual".

In gratitude they have donated the temple a *Sinha Vaganam* (vehicle used to carry the goddess). He had great regards for Thangammah. He says that the discourses she gave at this temple on *Amman* worship had helped in the development of this temple to its present state. Her discourses are attrative, to the point without any reference to unwanted, incidents. Many of the devotees regard her with high esteem, he concluded that it is she who enlightened us on the power of Durga.

Case C: A male teacher by profession, member of the Teacher Trade Union and the Communist Party, lives just outside the outer court yard of the temple, aged fifty five, gave us first hand information voluntarily on the temple. He confirmed this temple as the sister temple of the *Vairavar* temple and initially as the place for animal sacrifice. The present temple attracts a large number of devotees, the 'town crowd' and those from the suburbs of Jaffna town come here because they are unable to go to Tellippalai Durga Temple as before. He referred to the war-torn condition in Jaffna. The people need some form of relief, he says, and they come here with all their problems, including their protection and safety. The location of the temple close to the now popular Thirunelvelly market has also contributed to the increased crowd, he says. He further says, the priest, worship patterns, festivals and above all temple administrations are all important in making the temple popular. The priest, a graduate from the neighbouring University is an asset to the temple, he says, thus attracting a large number of students from the University. The Medical Faculty patronize the temple. The priest very convincingly impresses people with promises of successful marriage, employment-locally and abroad and this certainly attract the crowd, he says. He was however unhappy about the high cost of some of the new worship patterns particularly, the *Thiruvillakku puja* where

the participant is expected to wear Kancipuram sari, which many could not afford to buy.

As a consequence, he could not permit his two daughters to participate in these rituals. However they visit the temple and pray in silence. (At this time his wife and two daughters joined us).

The mother says, her second daughter now after a technical education has obtained a temporary job and was confident that the goddess will bless them. She voluntarily gave names of devotees who benefited by coming to this temple.

Case D: Woman, aged thirty five, strong devotee of the Sai Durga, husband is employed selling traffic tickets at the Thirunelvelly market. She is a regular devotee for the last five years. The *Masi magam* festival (Magam-one of the 27 stars in February) is their *ubayam*.

She says that she was a regular devotee of the Tellippalai Durga. She referred to two incidents. The cure of her brother's eye problem and secondly to the appearance of the goddess in her mother's dream and blessing her with the second son she was going to have. While referring to her husband, she says, he is educated up to O/L only. With a big family with nine children, he could not continue his studies, she says. She is proud of her husband's good qualities and this is the gift of the goddess, she says. They have a small *thottam* (garden land) and this gives an additional income, with this, the brother is sent abroad for foreign employment, who had given a dowry of a large sum for the sister's marriage. The husband's second sister with mars affliction performed the *Thiruvillakku puja* for two years and they have found her a partner employed in Canada, she said. We made a vow to offer the goddess *ottiyanam* (a gold belt) if this marriage takes place, and she said with joy that the sister had sent enough money to fulfill this vow. She was childless for some time and it was after praying to goddess Durga and observing the *sevvai* fasting and lime lamp lighting that she now has two boys and the third which she is carrying now will be a girl by the grace of Durga, she said with confidence. In spite of the family attachment to the goddess Durga, they still do not have a picture of the goddess Durga or even that of Saraswathy and probably she will never have them. When questioned on this, she said that her father had advised her not to have the picture of a warrior and powerful goddess at home. As for Saraswathy one should not have her with Laksmi for they will fight, she said. She is not concerned about the name Sai Durga. She, however, suggested like adding the prefix Gnana to Vairavar, as added to Durga, she concluded.

Case E: Female, aged 30 from Rube Lane, Kokkuvil married and is about to leave for Colombo to be with her husband.

She visited Durga temple for nine weeeks and observed *Sumangali* puja and on the ninth Tuesday she offered a Kanchchipuram Sarie and *thali pottu* to the temple, and on the same day her marriage was fixed she said.

Case F: Lady, age 48 of Potpathy Road, Kokkuvil. She had to come to the goddess to safeguard her daughter's *mangalyam*. It is this goddess who blessed the couple and prevented a separation. It is this goddess, she said who can give *Mangalya palam*. This is the place for young girls and boys to have their desires fulfilled. This temple, she remarked is accessible to all, at any time of the day.

She admired the administration at Tellippalai Durga temple and praised the maintenance of the temple, and conducting of *pujas* and festivals to time. The credit of this goes to Thangammah she added and satisfied with Sai Durga administration too. She is not at all happy at the name given to the main deity, she is critical of naming a goddess after a human-being.

2. Thalaidy (Velaively) Durga Temple-Nunavil

Thalaiyady is a tiny village in the Thenmarachchi division to the East of Tellippalai about 16 miles from it. In this village amidst the paddy fields is an Amman temple now attracting a large number of devotees after the present management of Kanapathi Sharma.

The Management of the temple has changed hands several times since its inception, and even cases have been filed in the courts to determine the ownership of the temple. Kanapathy Sharma, a priest of the Thalaiaddy (Velaively) Durga Temple worked at the Mariamman temple, Colombo for a short period. However, since he was not quite happy about working in Colombo, he was waiting for an opportunity to get back home. While in Colombo he made several contacts, particularly with the mass media. This he really made use of to his advantage and towards the development of the temple. When the temple management was preparing for the *Kumbaabishekam* he gave wide publicity to the event in the media (press, radio, television) and thereby was able to collect sufficient money towards the expenses. On his return to Jaffna, in 1980 he was given his due place in the temple. Once he assumed duty at the temple he brought many changes particularly in the rituals and many structural improvements to the temple as well.

He invited the most popular religious discourser, Shri Kirupanantha Variar from South India to the temple. His discourses, to the accompaniment of music attracted large crowds of devotees. Durga thuranthari Thangammah Appacuddy, was also invited to attract the devotees and the devotees flocked to listen to her discourses as well.

The visit by these two religious personalities made the temple quite popular in Jaffna, especially, Thenmaradchchi.

New Face of Thalaiyady Amman

In the Sanctum Sanctorum of the temple is Vishnu Durga. The original deity in the *ghora* form was removed from here and the image of Vishnu Durga was installed instead. The original Durga is now installed in a shrine room in the inner court yard. Vishnu in his normal form and in the *Anandasayana* (resting) form are installed to the right and left of the original image now in the second *mandapam*. The main deity, Kanapathy Sharma said, is Vishnu Durga, the wife of Vishnu. He further said that if it is Siva Durga, she must carry the *Chulam* and the *Kapalam* (skull).

The temple structure is somewhat peculiar and is not constructed according to the *Agama* tradition. The *Vasantha mandapam* (The shrine room where the deity is assembled for puja before being taking out in procession) and the *Yagasalai* face each other. In a traditional *Agama* temple, *Vasantha Mandapam* faces South and the *Yagasalai* West. The main shrine room faces eastward but the main entrance to the temple faces northward.

The main deity in the Sanctum sanctorum is also peculiar, for it is made out of good seasoned timber. Whereas in other temples it is always carved out of stone.

The temple has a permanent *Kodi thambam* (Flag Post) and *Eluntharuli Moorthy* (Deity taken in procession). The present priest, Kanapathy Sharma is quite an efficient man and within 6 months of resuming duty he acquired quite a lot of wealth to the temple and worked hard to make this temple popular. The *Eluntharuli Moorthy* was brought in procession from the Jaffna town covering a distance of twelve miles in the hot sun. The procession was welcomed from the beginning to the end by a large number of devotees, and this gave the temple a good collection of cash and popularity.

The priest has now taken a new role. He has now given up his role as a priest and has taken to the role of an administrator. The work of the priest is handled by another brahmin, who is specially employed for this. The former priest has now taken a role of a *Vellalar* in the temple of Jaffna.

The temple faces a lot of problems, particularly in relation to caste. The village in which the temple is located is highly conservative, and the caste factor plays a very important role in the life of the people. The people in the neighbouring village of Kalvayal are very conservative and abhorred the idea of having the temple opened to members of the depressed caste group. However, the manager making use of the present situation in Jaffna where the 'law enforcing group' is keen to develop a caste free society, opened the temple for all.

The manager is quite progressive in other respects as well. He was anxious to see that his children marry outside the priesthood. The eldest son-in-law is working in a bank, the second in a cement factory and the third in a private company.

Even his sons have given up being a priest. The eldest son is following a technical course and the second son has given up education, but he has also not taken up to priesthood.

Rituals in the Temple

The religious rituals practiced in this temple is more or less the same as in any other Durga temple. There is no fixed day or fixed time for the devotees to visit this temple. But on a Tuesday, it attracts quite a large number of devotees from the neighbouring villages Sarasalai, Meesalai, Sangathanai and Varani. The devotees who are now unable to go to Tellippalai Durga have no alternative but to attend in one of the temples close to their homes.

Thiruvillakku puja is quite popular here attracting quite a number of devotees, but now with satellite temples cropping up, the number is slightly on the decrease.

Addi (July) *Sevvai* is another important ritual observed here and over thousand devotees gather to celebrate this festival.

Chandi Homam is celebrated with pomp and pageantry. During the celebration of this important ritual nine *Sumangali penkal* (married women) assembled at the site of the *yaga*. They had no religious role to play, but just remained from the beginning to the end of the celebration. It is said that a fortune was spent for this, and on the last day, even Kanchipuram (expensive bridal) saries were also included in the massive *yaga* along with the normal offerings.

Kanapathy Sharma performed all the rites which a *Vellala* manager would in other temples. It is interesting to note that on the last day, just before the close of the ceremony he prostrated at the officiating priest and received his blessings followed by his family members.

It was only after this, the devotees got a turn to receive the blessings from the priest. The manager provided lunch for all those who came to the temple on the last day. It was a grand feast, but notably a caste distinction was observed while the meal was served. The depressed caste were served their lunch separately in the outer yard. They were very much hurt and disappointed and some even shed tears. The younger generation really believed that everything was going to be alright for them, the older generation ofcourse very wisely kept away and did not even bother to enter the temple even on normal days for the *puja*.

The manager priest said, the ritual was observed to invoke the blessings of the goddess and to protect them all from the present crisis. This particular *Chandi Homam* was celebrated in October 1992. It is note worthy to mention here that, a number of advertisements appeared in local Tamil dailies in Jaffna, requesting the public who will not be able to visit *Chandi Homam* to send their applications, indicating their stars, afflictions along with rupees twenty. This created a good income.

I shall now describe a few selected interviews with the devotees to illustrate the theme behind Durga worship in this temple.

Case A: A woman in her mid fifties, science teacher, but proficient in music as well. She has four children, resident of Chavakachcheri and this is her home town as well. She is a devotee of Durga and lead the *bhajanai* at the temple.

She stated, that she has been a devotee of Durga for over twenty five years. She was childless for some years after marriage and was desperate to have a child. She was introduced to Durga worship after listening to religious discourses by Thangammah Appacuddy. She has also gathered information on the significance of Durga worship from the magazine-Gnanapoomie. Her first child is now twenty five years old, and she was born on a Sunday at 12.15 p.m. This she said is important for it was this time, she finished her *bajanai* on a Sunday. Therefore, she named her Durga Devi. Her other children were also born on Sundays. The mother is diabetic and she said, that a wound which developed on her palm was cured by the grace of the goddess to the surprise of all, particularly the doctor who had lost all hopes of a cure and recommended amputation she said,

> "I laid all my problems at the feet of the goddess and prayed for help and she did answer my request"

with tears in her eyes. The well water in the *Nandavanam* (temple garden) amidst the *Thalai maram* (pandanus), groves has miraculous powers, she said. The trees are peculiar, for it flowers but never bears fruits which is to her, is another wonder.

The goddess in the Sanctum Sanctorum is Vishnu Durga for she carries *changu* and *cacara*, she said. She also said, that

"The goddess is loving and mother to all of us who come to her for help".

God Siva, to her is a god who always keep silent and it is his Sakti who responds to the requests made by all the devotees. "We come to Durga like a child coming to her mother for help and the goddess has never left us down" she concluded. She referred to the goddess at Tellippalai as Siva Durga because she carries the *chulam* and the *kapalam*. She admired the religious atmosphere that prevailed at the temple, and this she attributed to the efforts of Thangammah Appakuddy and her efficient administration. She praised the priest manager Ganapathy Sharma also for his efficient administration. 'He is honest, sincere and dedicated' she said, and as such she did not want any more changes in the temple administration.

Because of her devotion and long service to the temple she was given a place along with the priests on the last day of the *Chandi homam* when *dhanam* was offered to them.

Case B: A woman, aged twenty five, daughter of the case referred to above.

"My mother's devotion to Durga influenced me" she said. The goddess Durga is like a mother to her. She was depressed because she never had any direct *tharisanam* of the goddess. She confirmed all that her mother said, particularly in relation to her birth and the healing of the wound in her mother's palm. She comes to the temple with her friends, who are also devotees of Durga and most of them are married.

Case C: Female, aged 21, student, a regular devotee.

She stated that she started coming to the temple by the influence of her parents. She was quite young when she began to come to this temple and referred to the main deity as Amman. She said "however, twelve years ago people started referring to her as Durga. To me she is *ammah* always". She comes to the temple with her friends and present their problems, and, she said that *amman* has always answered their requests. When asked about the significance of the temple and the goddess, she said "It is difficult to see clearly the deity within the main shrine. The goddess appears in the very form related to one's frame of mind. If you are wanting to take revenge on someone, her appearance is in the *ghora* form, but, on the other hand, if you ask her for her grace, she appears in the *Satvic* form" she said. She further stated, that she always dreams of the goddess and in her dreams, the goddess appears in a charriot dressed in simple clothes and waving her hand as if calling her. Although young, this devotees's answers were very mature and philosophical.

She had praises for the administration and even compared it with Nallur Murugan Temple. "*Pujas* are conducted on time, the place is kept clean and a calmness prevails, so one could come and worship in peace without any form of disturbances and the others of my age group are happy with the temple priest" she stated. She abhorred caste discrimination and felt uneasy about the continued discrimination of the depressed caste groups. "The depressed caste members are not allowed to offer cooked meals, but they are asked to give the priest the raw items and the priest does the cooking and offers the same to the goddess on their behalf" she said. She stated that she never goes to any other temple, but had praises for Thangammah Appacuddy, the architect of the Durga temple at Tellippalai.

Case D: A woman, aged sixty, wife of a toddy tapper, and belongs to the Palla community.

She has been worshipping at this temple for over forty years and according to her, the temple was originally an Amman temple and only later an image of Durga was installed. She also admitted that earlier the devotees came to this temple only when they were afflicted with infectious diseases. She also referred to the new worship patterns and admitted that they were all too expensive for people like her. She has performed only the lime lamp lighting. The goddess she said, would not tolerate any form of impurity, and although she has a trident it is not so fearsome as Kali and she is for *Veeram* (courage). Her devotion to the goddess is for multiple reasons, and particularly to request the goddess to bless the region and the people and thereby give them peace and happiness. She expressed concern about her aged husband and the plight of her kith and kin without jobs. She visits Durga Temple at Tellippalai at least three times a year and it is from Thangammah Appacuddy's discourses that she has learnt about the new worship patterns. She praised the temple administration, particularly in recognizing the depressed caste group and making it possible for them to enter the temple, which is still denied to them in many of the other village temples. She felt deeply worried about this.

Case E: Male, aged 78, Textile Proprietor in Chavakachcheri.

He claimed responsibility for the development of the temple. He becomes possessed and in this state he gives advice to the devotees who come to the temple. This certainly made the temple popular. He started coming to this temple from the age of thirty five. He became a devotee of Durga only after reading about Swami Ramakrishna's life. He also confirmed that this temple was originally an Amman temple. At the time, the temple was restructured and a new image was being made,

the sulptor who was making it could not get the mould correctly until the devotees sang devotional songs in praise of the goddess Durga. He was blessed with *tharisanam* (gods appearance) on many occasions. She had even talked to him, he said. He said, that recently she had given *tharisanam* at the temple well. He confirmed that the goddess is *Vadakku vai selvi* as the main entrance faces north. He never goes to other temples but has only heard about them. Thangammah's success is the blessing of the goddess he said.

Case F: Male, welder, aged fifty, owner of four lorries, all named after the temple, Thalayampathy.

He also confirmed that the temple was originally known as Thalayady Amman Temple and the change of name did not matter to him. To him, the goddess is Amman. Durga, a powerful goddess is the only one who can give them what they needed. He gives '*Kanchi*' (boiled rice) once a year to all the devotees who come to the temple. He is unhappy for not having *tharisanam*, whereas his daughter has already had it. He highly commended the administration and in particular the punctuality with which all the activities are carried out.

He, however, did not say good about the manager, whom he thinks does not utilize the temple income for the development of the temple. He is confused about the participants in the new rituals, particularly the reason for married women part taking in the *Thiruvillakku puja* and unmarried women in the *Sumangali puja*, which he says are not meant for them. He is also critical over changing the puja days from Mondays and Fridays to Tuesdays and Fridays. He is not able to comment on the Durga image in the Sanctum Sanctorum. He said the naming of Durga is the influence from Tellippalai, which he had visisted only once.

Case G: A woman, aged fifty four, teacher by profession and a Durga devotee for the last ten years.

The deity in the main sanctum sanctorum to her is distinctly seen from the main court yard unlike in other temples. She worshipped at this temple for six consecutive Tuesdays, but so far she has not received the grace of the goddess but she is confident that she will be successful one day. The main deity is Siva Durga but she admitted that there is contradiction between the face of the deity and the weapons she carries. She is not happy with the priest and complained about the inaudible manner in which he recites the mantra during the *puja*. It is always good to hear what the priest chants during the *puja*, she said.

She had praises for the administration and even compared it with Nallur Murugan Temple. "*Pujas* are conducted on time, the place is kept clean and a calmness prevails, so one could come and worship in peace without any form of disturbances and the others of my age group are happy with the temple priest" she stated. She abhorred caste discrimination and felt uneasy about the continued discrimination of the depressed caste groups. "The depressed caste members are not allowed to offer cooked meals, but they are asked to give the priest the raw items and the priest does the cooking and offers the same to the goddess on their behalf" she said. She stated that she never goes to any other temple, but had praises for Thangammah Appacuddy, the architect of the Durga temple at Tellippalai.

Case D: A woman, aged sixty, wife of a toddy tapper, and belongs to the Palla community.

She has been worshipping at this temple for over forty years and according to her, the temple was originally an Amman temple and only later an image of Durga was installed. She also admitted that earlier the devotees came to this temple only when they were afflicted with infectious diseases. She also referred to the new worship patterns and admitted that they were all too expensive for people like her. She has performed only the lime lamp lighting. The goddess she said, would not tolerate any form of impurity, and although she has a trident it is not so fearsome as Kali and she is for *Veeram* (courage). Her devotion to the goddess is for multiple reasons, and particularly to request the goddess to bless the region and the people and thereby give them peace and happiness. She expressed concern about her aged husband and the plight of her kith and kin without jobs. She visits Durga Temple at Tellippalai at least three times a year and it is from Thangammah Appacuddy's discourses that she has learnt about the new worship patterns. She praised the temple administration, particularly in recognizing the depressed caste group and making it possible for them to enter the temple, which is still denied to them in many of the other village temples. She felt deeply worried about this.

Case E: Male, aged 78, Textile Proprietor in Chavakachcheri.

He claimed responsibility for the development of the temple. He becomes possessed and in this state he gives advice to the devotees who come to the temple. This certainly made the temple popular. He started coming to this temple from the age of thirty five. He became a devotee of Durga only after reading about Swami Ramakrishna's life. He also confirmed that this temple was originally an Amman temple. At the time, the temple was restructured and a new image was being made,

the sulptor who was making it could not get the mould correctly until the devotees sang devotional songs in praise of the goddess Durga. He was blessed with *tharisanam* (gods appearance) on many occasions. She had even talked to him, he said. He said, that recently she had given *tharisanam* at the temple well. He confirmed that the goddess is *Vadakku vai selvi* as the main entrance faces north. He never goes to other temples but has only heard about them. Thangammah's success is the blessing of the goddess he said.

Case F: Male, welder, aged fifty, owner of four lorries, all named after the temple, Thalayampathy.

He also confirmed that the temple was originally known as Thalayady Amman Temple and the change of name did not matter to him. To him, the goddess is Amman. Durga, a powerful goddess is the only one who can give them what they needed. He gives '*Kanchi*' (boiled rice) once a year to all the devotees who come to the temple. He is unhappy for not having *tharisanam*, whereas his daughter has already had it. He highly commended the administration and in particular the punctuality with which all the activities are carried out.

He, however, did not say good about the manager, whom he thinks does not utilize the temple income for the development of the temple. He is confused about the participants in the new rituals, particularly the reason for married women part taking in the *Thiruvillakku puja* and unmarried women in the *Sumangali puja*, which he says are not meant for them. He is also critical over changing the puja days from Mondays and Fridays to Tuesdays and Fridays. He is not able to comment on the Durga image in the Sanctum Sanctorum. He said the naming of Durga is the influence from Tellippalai, which he had visisted only once.

Case G: A woman, aged fifty four, teacher by profession and a Durga devotee for the last ten years.

The deity in the main sanctum sanctorum to her is distinctly seen from the main court yard unlike in other temples. She worshipped at this temple for six consecutive Tuesdays, but so far she has not received the grace of the goddess but she is confident that she will be successful one day. The main deity is Siva Durga but she admitted that there is contradiction between the face of the deity and the weapons she carries. She is not happy with the priest and complained about the inaudible manner in which he recites the mantra during the *puja*. It is always good to hear what the priest chants during the *puja*, she said.

Case H: A woman, aged twenty one, student, follower of Durga since the age of seven.

She fasted for seven consecutive Tuesdays earlier and now is fasting on Tuesdays and Fridays, but so far had no *tharisanam*. The appearance of the deity depends on what a devotee imagines she said, and to her, the deity here is in the *Satvic* form. She had praises for the Durga temple at Tellippalai and its administration. She had no bad feelings for the priest at this temple, but many did not agree with her, she said. All the *pujas* are performed to time and this is all what a devotee needs.

Cash I: A lady, age thirty eight, devotee of Durga for the last six years.

To her the deity in the main shrine room is ammah, mother, and the name means nothing to her. She fasted for seven consecutive Tuesdays. She praised the administration for celebrating the major festivals at this temple.

Case J: Female, aged twenty five, attended this temple since her student days.

She along with her friends fasted for seven consecutive Tuesdays and observed *Gowri Nonbu* (a special fasting observed by females in the month of October). They fasted to get jobs and a happy married life. Two of her friends have gone abroad, one after marriage and the other for employment. So far, she has not been successful but was hopeful that she will also be blesed soon. In fact, a sastri had advised her to observe the lime light fasting in order to get the blessings of the goddess.

Case K: Female, aged forty six, from Vanpulmadu, She has four sons and a daughter. The youngest child is in grade eight. Her eldest son is married and has one child and runs bullock cart hiring service to the farmer population. Her second son also followed the same trade but suddenly left home to join the movement. The disturbed mother sought the help of the goddess and made a vow to offer a sovereign to the goddess if her son returned. She said, that the goddess appeared to her and indicated the safe return of her son. The son fell ill and he was allowed to return. She believes that the illness developed as a result of the goddess and thus her son managed to return. She kept up her promise and offered the goddess a chain. It is from then on, she became a Durga devotee of mirusuvil. Due to transport problems the husband and children are not keen to take her to the Mirusuvil temple, so she was forced to patronize this temple and now she is a regular visitor. She is fasting for seven consecutive Tuesdays, but on the first Tuesday she was unable to go to the temple due to her monthly sickness. But after that, she had no problems. She is now observing the *puja* along with her daughter. She has no preference for any other goddess. To her all the different forms represents one and the same mother goddess

popularly known as Amman. She even said that Durga must be the child of Sakti. We observe *Navaratri* festival and this is the only time when her family prays to the goddess, Durga and she was unable to say anything more than this.

Case L: Male, a doctor from Karainagar, an island off the coast of Jaffna.

His wife is from Thalayady, they live now in Chundikuli in the Jaffna town. Have two children; a boy of nine years and a girl slightly older. The wife is an ardent devotee but not the doctor. He is on the other hand a strong Sai Baba devotee. However, after listening to devotional songs relating Sai Baba and Durga, his attitude changed. He now looks up to Durga as a benevolent goddess.

He visits this temple once a month and said that he is not a regular devotee. He criticized the worship patterns in the temple. He was not happy about the manner in which *Chandi Homam* was celebrated. The Priest performing this must live in the temple and should abstain from going to his residence he said.

3. Gnana Durgai Temple-Miriusuvil

Mirisuvil is a village about twelve miles south of Jaffna town on the Kandy-Jaffna road. It is a region of sandy soil suitable for coconut cultivation. A small *Kuruchchi* in this village was selected in 1967 to establish a colonization scheme for educated women, the first of its kind in the Peninsula. The selected women had either a Diploma in agriculture from the school of Agriculture or were educated up to the Ordinary Level. Each one of them were given two acres of land and cash allowance for settling in.

Subsequently more women, hundred and twenty in number were selected and given land and cash for their initial expenses. The colonization scheme expanded in size and proved to be a success, but the civil disturbances that followed in the region resulted as a threat to the scheme and some of them deserted the place. As a result a part of the land still remains undeveloped. The women selected for the scheme were unmarried but now almost over 90% of them are married and the scheme has now developed into a family project. The members are fairly prosperous, but could have faired better, if not for the civil disturbances.

As the colony expanded, the members thought it was necessary to have a temple of their own. A temple for the goddess Durga was set up in the plot of land belonging to Manonmani. She married Navaratnam, a farmer from the neighbouring village, and he thus became a part of the colony.

There are many myths related by the members in relation to the establishment of the temple. Manonmanie and her husband have undergone heavenly experiences since their marriage, they attributed this to the work of the gods and goddess as strange feelings were experienced by the travellers, particularly those who travel by night on the Jaffna-Kandy road, which passes right across this village. Some of them confessed that they often heard the peeling of a temple bell source or from the *changu* or the *chemakalam* (gong). In fact a few of them said, that, they had seen a lady dressed in white walking through the colony, particularly in the one belonging to Manonmanie. This myth spread throughout the colony and even outside to neighbouring villages.

The hunters who normally come to this area for a game, could not kill an animal for some time, although they came daily. The disappointed crowd began to curse the Navaratnam family. In fact persuaded them to leave the colony for some time until normalcy returned to the place.

Navaratnam was very angry about this. As an atheist, he did not pay any attention to the advise given and he continued to live in the same place. Moreover, he criticized the superstitious beliefs. He even volunteered to meet this 'lady' clad in white, alone and to find a solution to this problem. He had a hearty laugh and gave his own interpretation of the whole issue. According to him, the moving figure in the dark is nothing but the grazing cattle, and that the sound of the peeling bells is produced by the tiny bells tied round the neck of the herd.

In the course of time, according to myth, that is popular among the colony people, the goddess appeared in Navaratnam's dream and said that she is going to convert the well in their compound into a '*Theertha kundu*' and disappeared. But nothing could change Navaratnam's conviction. A few days later, Manonmanie became excited and showed signs of possession, and in this state she said "I am Thanthonreswari (goddess who originated on her own) was worshipped in this form under the margosa and naval trees for a long time and subsequently was abandoned. I have now come back to re-establish myself'. To Navaratnam, the possessed status of his wife came as a great shock, and he labelled it as a psychological problem and ignored the myth that the people were trying to spread around the colony. However, when a *Poosari* came to know about this, he was anxious to give recognition to the goddess within Manonmanie, so he cooked milk rice every day and offered it to her. This continued for some time for Navaratnam was kept in the dark about the whole matter, but when he came to know of it, became horrified and not knowing what to do, cut down the two trees referred to earlier. To his surprise and to the

surprise of all, the trees continued to remain in the same spot, according to the myth related.

Navaratnam in the course of time became sick, lost all his wealth, he had no income and suffered. At this time, his friends and relatives who visited the family, condemned Navaratnam for his self destruction without any respect for the religion. Vinasithamby, a well known Discourser of religious literature from Alaveddy visited the family. He contributed very much in institutionalizing possessed persons in the recent past in Jaffna. He has close contact with Tellippalai Durga temple. Navaratnam had long sessions with Vinasithamby and within the shortest time he became a slave to Durga. The relatives and friends who were waiting for this day were anxious to reinforce the new thinking that had taken place in Navaratnam. In order to achieve this, they took Navaratnam to a man who cast 'Anjanam', here the answer to a particular problem will be read out from a betel spread out with black ink. It is said that during this process, Navaratnam is said to have shouted with joy and excitement when he saw the image of Durga clearly on the betel leaf. During my interview, Navaratnam himself admitted this, and he further said, that he fell down on his face as he saw the figure of the goddess and prayed to her as follows;

'Oh dear Ammah, please come forward
to protect us from all evil.
Take away our sorrows and give us joy.
Protect my family,
the people in this colony,
and the country from all evil.
You are the one who can do it,
I fall at your feet'

On another occasion, the goddess appeared again in Navaratnam's dream and pointed at a margosa tree and told him "a treasure is burried there, take it and build a temple for me". Navaratnam, consulted a magician and with his help tried to locate the treasure. When they dug about three feet, they came across a *kamandalam*, but as they tried to lift it, it went deeper and deeper into the earth and they could do nothing except to dig further and further down. Both Navaratnam and the magician were anxious to have the *kamandalam* pulled out in order to divide the treasure between them. The anxious Navaratnam sent his son down the pit. With great difficulty the son managed to pull it up. It was a difficult task and in the end he succeed. The *kamandalam* was taken to Navaratnam's house in a procession and kept in their shrine room and due respect was given to it. On an auspicious day, in

the month of June according to the Tamil almanac, on the day of the planet 'Utharam' *the kamandalam* was forced open in front of the devotees. As expected, gold coins fell to the ground, and joined to form a single piece. This disappointed Navaratnam and the magician who were eager to divide the treasure. To their utter disappointment, the gold disappeared into thin air. Navaratnam further continued and confessed that the goddess had demonstrated that her might is greater than that of anyone else and the sorcerer or any magician cannot compete with her might.

The devotees in the colony felt happy that the sacred well had been dug at no cost and that too in a single night. They were also aware not only of the power of the goddess but that had exposed the greediness which Navaratnam and the magician had for the treasure.

One of the devotees residing close to the temple continued with the myth. He said a few months after the *kamandalam* incident, one of the devotees saw a living *Valampuri Changu*, a snail with a right handed coil, lying close to the same margosa tree, near the well.

The devotees began to feed this creature with fruits and milk offered to the goddess. It died after some time and is now preserved and is being used as a special vessel for the *abishekam*. It is given a place of honour in the Sanctum Sanctorum.

Navaratnam at this stage admitted that he was foolish not to have given serious thought to the signals given by the goddess and the same time felt guilty for not paying any attention to the construction of the temple. He had no finances of his own for the construction of the temple. At this stage having no other alternative approached the goddess to give the necessary guidance and support for the construction work. He continued to say, that the goddess appeared in the dream again and told him as follows,

"Your wife will take possession of me, and remember that this is the way in which I demonstrate my presence to my devotees. It is through this media I give advise to my devotees and comfort them when necessary. It is in this possessed state that I cure the illnesses of the devotees. This dialogue I have with the devotees attract them to me, and in the course of time my name will become popular and more devotees will come and this in the course of time give you enough wealth, much more than that is necessary to construct a 'house', temple for me". With these words, he said, that the goddess disappeared.

Navaratnam since then became a very ardent devotee of the goddess. He continued to say that the goddess will show her *Nava* (nine form of art) and *Sabtha kalai* (seven

form of art) through the trustee of the temple and this means the goddess is able to take away all forms of sufferings of her devotees.

Following these incidents, the goddess continued to appear through Manonmanie, and this brought an increase in the number of the devotees coming to the temple which increased the income.

The temple construction work commenced in the month of May. It is said that the goddess herself selected the site for the temple and further it was she who supervised and directed any change or alteration in the plan but through Manonmanie in her possessed state.

The image for the temple was sculptured by the artist, Sinnathamby Kunam from Kalvayal, a neighbouring village.

The temple now stands magnificantly amidst the village background of coconut trees. The colony people are very proud of the temple. The *kumbaabishekam* was held on 02.07.1990. The goddess herself selected the auspicious day and the officiating priest. The Priest by the name of Kanthan Kurukkal is from Batticaloa. The Priest is neither a brahmin priest nor even a Saiva Kurukkal. He belongs to goldsmith caste but trained as a Priest.

Manonmanie, the New Face in Mirusuvil

Manonmanie refers to the goddess as Gnana Durga when she is in a possessed state. According to her, she is able to predict continuously for long hours without any difficulty.

Manonmanie is clever, intelligent and has a good flow of language and is able to dramatize to convince her devotees for eg; she would generally feel for the devotee and tears would role down her cheeks on seeing the sufferings undergone by them. Her language is so eloquent that she is able to frame her questions in such a way, that the client would never hesitate to answer.

The day to day activities of the temple are conducted according to a planned schedule and no change is entertained. There are a group of volunteers who have various roles to play in the temple activities for eg: one group to receive the devotees at the entrance by offering them tea and finally guide them through the temple. A few small huts are constructed in the outer courtyard for the devotees to rest particularly those who come from long distances. Apart from the time allocated for the temple *puja* and for *kaddu chollal* (predictions) the

devotees are kept busy, for the volunteers would talk to them and give them the necessary counseling.

Kaddu chollal take place on Tuesdays and Fridays only and that too at a particular time. There is a ticket system and the clients are expected to take a number as they come to the temple by paying a fixed sum.

Those who come for auspicious predictions are expected to take the first ten tickets, anyone coming late would not be accommodated in this group. Those who come for auspicious predictions like marriage arrangements, house warming and the like are expected to be at the temple at four o'clock in the morning to obtain the ticket. In all, about eighty tickets are purchased by devotees per day. Each ticket is sold at rupees twenty, but if any one questions her predictions she does not hesitate to return the money.

Programme for the day

The programme for the day begins at 9 a.m.. The *puja* is conducted by Navaratnam, her husband.

He is not a priest and so the ceremony is rather vague and short as compared with any other temples. He waves the lit brass lamps one by one in front of the goddess and offer the flowers, he does not recite any mantra. As the *puja* is to be started Manonmanie would come and take her position in front of the Sanctum Sanctorum. She is always dressed in a maxi gown and carries a whip in hand. At the end of the *puja* one could notice a slight movement in her body. Navam would apply holy ash on her head and cut a lime into two on top of her head. At this time the *udukku*, a folk musical instrument is played, Manonmanie with possessed state would dance to its rhythm. She has a very slim body most suited for this dance. As soon as this is over, the first phase of her predictions will begin.

She will begin first with predicting the problem areas, trouble spots and the like relating to current situations in the Peninsula.

In the next phase, she attends to sick clients taking them on a priority basis, based on the seriousness of the illness. The patients are brought to her no matter how sick they are. She commands those unable to walk to get up and walk, the clients simply obey her commands. As each patient reaches her, she would anoint the head with *theertham* and then touch the body with the whip, particularly that part of the body that is affected. (Plate 5.5).

During this process she would say that the client is affected either by Madan, Sooniam, or Kadan as a result of the *sooniam* implicated upon by an enemy. The sickness ranges from a mere wound to cancer, and mental illness as well. Those who are instructed to undertake the '*kaai vedduthal*', cutting of limes shoud wait for the night when the ceremony would take place where Navaratnam would be the officiating priest.

Two specific observations were noted during the proceedings. Manonmanie will speak in such a way to gain the confidence of her clients for this she carefully select the words she uses and often she would say to the client that he or she should recover soon, they should not worry for anything, they would soon be happy and live as before, in order to achieve all these they must have full faith and confidence in the goddess to whom they have come to with their problems.

Secondly, she would identify those who are feeble, and very sick, very wisely she would request them to go to the hospital to be cured of their malnutrition etc, and then should come to her for the final recovery.

In the next scene she would be wearing the typical anklet used by Kanaki Amman (Pathini) to make the noise and at the same time bend on to a walking stick and hold a tray of flowers. The devotees would approach her one by one take the flowers and place them on her head and feet and ask for the blessings. She would remain here until the last of the devotee had the chance to pray to her. Once this is over she would get prepared for the next phase.

Manonmanie will now walk to one of the huts, from where *kaddu chollal* will take place. In the hut, there is discipline, and the ladies will sit on one side and the men on the other. In the hut is placed a *trident* and a lit *kuththuvillaku*. All devotees will be in position before Manonmanie comes. She would take her position in the hut, and the clients would approach her one by one according to their numbers in an orderly manner. As the client takes position, she would first enter into a casual conversation about their family, and about their visits. From the answers, she is able to gather some information regarding the client.

The conversation between Manonmanie and her clients recorded in December 1993 is given below;

Case A : A teacher from Kopay, aged forty with his wife, aged thirty, both are regular customers and hence the interview commences without any prior introductions.

Amman : You are worried because you are childless, apart from this, you worry about your unmarried sister too. You are shedding tears because of this and you do this without the knowledge of your sister, you are

anxious about your sister's future and you worry every minute. You are thinking that before her marriage you should not have a child. You don't share your worries with your wife, because you fear that she will also worry.

She finally concludes very emotionally in a touching manner, Is it not so, my son?

The husband and wife were spell bound and tears ran down their faces, both were emotional, Manonmanie recommences.

Amman : Truly, and very truly I will cure your worries, you should not worry for anything. Don't unnecessarily trouble your mind, both of you should fast for nine Tuesdays and visit the temple and pray to her. During the day of the fast you should not talk to one another. On the tenth Tuesday, you must cook sweet rice, offer it to the goddess and end your fast. During the time of the fast itself you will conceive. (Plate 5.6)

In addition, your sister will also soon get married, bring her also to me. In order to cast away her afflictions you must undertake the *kaaiveddal*. I will find good answers to all your problems.

She applies *vipoothy* on their forehead and offers them the same in their palm and immediately was prepared to receive the next client. One could notice a change in the appearance of the first clients. Initially their faces showed anxiety grief and discomfort, when they left, their faces were calm, less worried and happier.

Case B : A male teacher, forty years old, in a depressed state came to the temple with his mother. He was a new comer, Manonmanie used the normal tactics to gather information, but she received only a smile or a giggle as the answer, at this stage she appeared to be slightly angry and asked as follows;

Amman: You will smile sarcastically. But you cannot smile here in this manner, those three acted like this in your village lost their sight. Even the educated can fall into an abandoned well, you will not talk to any one, you are so stubborn, are you thirty four years or forty years old? not married, is that so! you had a love affair earlier, she cheated you later, it is only after this, that you attained this unhappy 'psychological state and your physical illness, pain in you, hands and legs and you are unable to drink water and you don't like to have a bath, is it not so?

You have *soonaiam* in your stomach, and anxiety is it not?

The man did not answer to any of these questions and only the mother answered.

Mother: When he was teaching at Trincomalee, the shock he underwent as a result of the atrocities of the forces, that he was in to this state. He took treatment from several places but was never cured.....and at the end she asked whether her son will get married?

Amman : We will first cure his illness and then see about his marriage. Surely, I will cure his illness we must first treat him, for his anxiety, *kaai vedda vendum*, cutting of fruit. It will be good if you stay here to attend to this.

She tried to talk to the man again.

Amman: You have no faith in me, why did you come here then? Were you brought here by force? do you believe me, now you are wondering how I knew all your mysteries.

The man continued to giggle and showed no response.

Amman: I will somehow or other find a cure for your illness, you can then resume your teaching service, don't worry about anything. Do exactly as I tell you, you must offer *kanikai* to all the *navakragas* (9 planets).

I tried to find out from the clients the truth and the cause for the man's illness, the mother continued to maintain her explanation for this and also admitted that they had visisted all the available medical expertise and had come to this temple because they had heard so much about the miraculous power of the goddess. The mother looked frustrated and worried.

Case C: A sixteen year old girl with her mother, fifty two years. The girl had joined the militant group, and the mother managed to get her back and had brought her to the temple.

Amman: Your education is limited, educated only upto grade six, it is your friends who had this bad influence on you, you have a bad temper, but with a loving heart. If the mother does not give you money, you will frighten her saying that you will join the militants. You ask her for a wrist watch, chain and ring.

The mother and daughter showed dissatisfaction over this.

Mother: We came here only with confidence, do not doubt us.

Amman: I will accept the money only when you have complete faith in me.

And offering *vipoothy* dismisses them. She now looking at the others gathered, said that there were others who have antagonized one, but all of them came back, and pointing at one person in the crowd said, that he also behaved in a similar manner.

In my interview with the clients, I was able to see that the mother and daughter have come there, so that the daughter would be blessed by the goddess so that she will not join the militants anymore.

Case D: A fifty year old man, owner of a rice mill. He had come to ask about something he had lost.

Amman: Have you lost something which was kept under close custody, is it jewellery or is it something else.....

The man answered that it is rice and diesel and also admits that there is no watchman for the last two or three weeks.

Amman: When the property was lost, it was ten o'clock and this was robbed by a soul known to you, the one who robbed is of a fair complexion, straight hair, married with two children and is only twenty years old. He lives to the west of the mill, for anything '*Illai kadduvum*' (meaning to make a vow that the thief should suffer). Your planetary period is also not good that is why you faced all these problems. Keep a watchman and this is the advise from the goddess herself.

You should not identify the person and go for a fight with him.

Comment

There was no answer to the question asked, the client did not know whether he will get back the lost property or not. It is to be noted here that in order to comfort the client, the theft was attributed to a bad planetary position.

Case E : Male, fifty eight years, wife fifty five years from another district. This appeared to be a visit to return their thanks. This is their third visit to the temple. The man is a cancer patient who was taken to Colombo for treatment and was diagnosed to be incurable. He became very sick and returned home. With no medical aid, they came to this temple to be blessed by Manonmanie. The goddess had comforted and blessed them.

Amman: How are you now?

Wife: Much better and my husband is now able to walk and eat at least *kanchi*, all this is with your blessings.

It is only after drinking the young coconut first offered to the goddess, he is better..

Case F: Also a medical case, lady fourty eight years old, husband fifty two years old and her mother sixty five years old. She was carried to the temple by the husband and mother. Her legs were swollen, she was placed before the Amman.

Amman: You can do it, get up (amidst tears and in a low voice said) You are worried as to who will look after the children, you are worried that your wife might desert you and this is what worries you.

The way the Amman dramatized brought tears not only in the eyes of the three clients, but in those of the others in the audience as well, Amman now tries to change the atmosphere.

Amman: Your sister, is trying to swindle your land property and she in order to be successful in her venture took to sorcery. Do not worry for this, your wife will not die. Along with sorcery, the planetary position of your youngest child is also not good for her. Therefore it is good to keep them apart at least for some time. Once the bad period is over everything is going to be alright for you.

I will give you *kaval*, protection methods, bury these at the places indicated by me. Before anything else you should take your wife to the hospital and have the leg swelling attended to. After that, I will do the needful. Perform *archanai* to Ragu, Kethu, apply *vipoothy* to her legs. Give her '*kasayam*' (decoction of varied medicinal plants). There is no danger for life and one should not worry for anything.

She now dismisses them after giving them holy ash.

Another visit was made to the temple in the month of March on a Monday in 1994. The last Monday of this is a special day for mother goddess. On this day, Mononmanie would stand a top of a sword held a few feet from the floor by four volunteers (Plate 5.7) and bless the devotees.

Conversation between Manonmanie and her clients recorded in March 1994 is given below:

Case G: A brother aged about forty and a sister about twenty four approached Manonmanie, she looked at them and said as follows;

Amman: Have you come to this temple before?

The brother nodded his head to show that he has.

Amman: The matter related to the girl has been truly asked. They are now living in a refugee camp, they go to the jungle edge on the eastern end to answer the call of nature. At this time a bad incident occured when this girl went alone, a young man followed her, who had been watching her everyday.

The client did not have an answer to this.

Amman: Her throat was strangled and she was dragged to the ground and force was used on her, she cried for her safety, but since no one could come to her aid, she was dragged into the thick jungle and raped. The man who took her already is a father of three children, medium height, dark skinned straight hair. He resides South East from your house.

You have complained to the *kavalthurai*, local police force. Two are held suspects, and they are being inquired by them. This happened suddenly, Thursday is a good day but not Tuesday and Saturday. A *life* should have been lost, even now there is a wound, put the *Nerthi* on me, do not go to the courts to punish the guilty. This young girl should have a future.

He lives to the east of your house, but now lives to the west of the refugee camp.

Keep a *Nerti* to the Amman, I myself will punish him, I will put him on bed in the next two and half months time.

As a consequence of this incident you will be angry, and will want to take revenge.

Looking at the man she said,

You have a young wife and children hence do not go for trouble. The girl is worried out of anxiety therefore you should perform '*Kai veddal*', Perform *Archanai* to the planets Jupiter and Mars. She Offered them holy ash and dismissed them.

Comment

Her advice need to be commented, the girl was raped, if the matter is taken to the courts, it will bring disgrace to the family, particularly because the man is already married. Under these circumstances she consoles them saying that she would attend to the matter herself.

Case H: A young girl of twenty five years, first visit.

Amman: You have come truly and surely. You are stubborn, full of anger, well educated, but lament for there is no reward for the education received. Are there five females and one male in the family?

Client : One boy and two girls, I am the youngest.
She inquires about her marriage.

Amman: Are you twenty four years old?

Client : I have completed twenty four.

Amman: Marriage proposals came from two families, when one party came, you were rude to them and sent them away. He works in the government *varkam*. (She uses this word frequently for categories)

Client: No, the party came from non-governmental *varkam*.

Amman: He is not steady and contradicts his own answers. He has already cheated another girl, because of this, this marriage is not good and Amman also does not like it. *Tharam* and *Guru* (wife and teacher) are according to one's fate. You will get married before the end of twenty five years. The new marriage proposal will be eighty five percent acceptable. The boy is from France varkam, from a good family background, there are six members in the family (but the girl denies this and confirms that is seven). The boy does not claim a big dowry.

Client: Will I get married in a foreign country?

Amman : You will be asked to come before April fifteenth, so be happy.

Client : Will I have any problem from the party that came initially?

Amman : He lives about half a mile from yours, you will have no problem because of him, so don't fear.

You will have the *thali* tied in Colombo. I will give you protection when you leave for Colombo, you break a coconut at this temple even if I am not there.

It will be good if you can leave from here without any delay.

Client: Can I take my brother with me?

Amman: Is he sixteen years old?

Client : No, he is only fourteen years old, but he was not given a pass to leave Jaffna.

Amman : It is better avoid any confrontation, let him study here. Even if he goes there he will have trouble, therefore do not take him.

Now Manonmanie closes her eyes as in meditation and recite as follows;

Amman : Veera Durga, Gnana Durga, please give *Thirumangalyam* to this girl without delay.

Once you have attained the married status you can offer to the goddess what you can.

You must perform *Archanai* to Murugan and Pillayar.

She tied the sacred thread and offers holy ash before dismissing them.

Case I : A boy of twenty three years, he approaches Manonmanie in a frightened state.

Amman : Do come forward, have no fear, I am waiting for you. You were educated, but gave up with grade eight. You must be having in all five sisters and brothers.

Client: No, there are seven members.

Amman : Are you the second in the family?
Are you employed?

Client: Yes, doing handiwork.

Amman : Anything to do with iron? Is it in a garage?
Have you come to ask about a soul, male or female?
Is it about a sister or is it about a girl for you?

Client at this stage nodded his head to indicate that it is about a girl.

Amman : It is three years since you loved this girl?
Is she now twenty one years old?

Client : She is only eighteen years old.

Amman : You have kept this a secret for this long, you have exchanged photographs, you gave promise at a temple.

Client : No, the promise was given in the lane adjoining our house.

Amman : She left the house on her own, is it not, when she came, she came empty handed.

Client : No, she came with her clothes.

Amman : You were separated in the courts, now you have come to ask whether you will live together.

Client : Yes, she has not yet completed eighteen, and we agreed to find out whether we could come to a settlement.

Amman : They have taken the girl to a new place. You have now found the hiding place.

Client : No, I have not, they decided to send her to a foreign country.

Amman : You belong to two different *inangal*, races (meaning caste, talking of caste is prohibited in Jaffna).

Is it your race, who did not want her?

Client : No, it is their race.

Amman : You made *nerthi* to Amman, now why do you curse her?

They are making arrangements to get the pass to send her abroad. If you talk to the militants, you will find a solution or else it will be difficult.

He reluctantly admitted that he possess the photo of the girl and her letters.

Amman : Place the faith in Durga and go, I will help you and will come to you.

Do not scold me in this manner. You scolded the Amman, because you did not ask me before you started to love her.

Justice and administration should bring the two of you together.

God help the helpless.

This happened because of the antagonism of Mars and Saturn.

Amman now addressed as follows in a mediating position;

Amman : Veera Durga, Gnana Durga, this boy is in tears for no fault of his (she applies holy ash). She lives four miles away, everything is going to be alright for you.

She now calls for the next case.

Case J : A boy of seventeen years had come to ask about his education, he had come for the first time to the temple in desperation.

Amman : You have still not received your results, you are stubborn and always in an angry mood.

You have altogether eight brothers and sisters.

Your father is keen to send you abroad for employment but not your mother. You also do not like it.

Client : There are three girls and one boy. Yes my father wants me to go, but I want to study.

Amman : You continue to study because you are young, while going to sit for the exam, come to me I will make you successful. Do not go abroad. Perform *an archanai* to the planet Venus.

At this stage a woman about fifty five years old, a principal by profession enters the scene. Amman turns her attention to this lady and comfort as follows;

Amman : You have come here, because your husband is sick, you never go anywhere but come to me only. Veera Durga, Gnana Durga will never let you down, you can pluck courage and attend to your work in comfort.

She offers holy ash to both and dismissed them.

Case K : A male, sixteen years old, has come for the first time.

Amman : Have you come to ask about education or about a girl.

Client : About my education.

Amman : Are you in grade nine ?

Client answers in the negative.

Amman : Did you sit for . this year's examination *varkam*?

You are asking whether reserutiny will bring you success.

To this the boy nods his head to indicate a positive answer.

Amman : The scene in front of me is that this will not be successful. You will have to re-sit, and before the examination come to me, I will give you success.

She offers holy ash and dismisses him.

Case L : A male of twenty four years, has come with a young girl who was seated by his side. Amman questions as follows;

Amman : Was the decision taken last week?

The client denies it.

Amman : Is this girl your sister or your wife?

Client: She is my cousin, she is a regular visitor and I accompanied her.

I have sat for my A/L examination.

Amman: Have you received your marks?

The client confirmed this but looked disappointed.

Amman: Did you sit for commerce *varkam*.

The client denied it and said he sat for the Arts examination.

Amman : You are concerned about your progress, is it not?
You can continue to study and you need to have no fears.
Thursday and Tuesdays are good for you.

The boy ignoring all this amidst tears in his eyes asked whether he would enter the university.

Amman : What marks did you score, is it two sixty five.

The boy reluctantly amidst tears said, he obtained only two fourty five marks and continued to sob more.

Amman : You prayed to Murugan before sitting for the exam, I will make it a success, do not worry any more.

He is also offered holy ash and asked to go home.

Case M: A lady fifty five years old, husband outside, daughter has attained age and is anxious to see that the husband returns, the date for the ceremony should be fixed before the new year. He has written to say that he is coming home, but is anxious whether he will be back in time.

Amman: Do not worry, every one says that they will give you honey and sweet meats, why are you worried, go ahead and make all the necessary arrangements for the ceremony. Your husband will certainly come.

Case N: A lady about thirty years old, narrates her story, a family who lived in my land for over six years, is refusing to vacate the land, they have even obtained a letter from the militant authorities to say that they be permitted to stay. She is anxious about her property and that she had come to the goddess for she has no one else to help her.

Amman : Don't worry, *thambimar* (meaning the militants) did nothing, they have shown you a bogus letter, do not worry about it. I assure you that this letter has not come from the Head quarters. I will give you protection, you can make a *nerti* and attend to the work connected with their evacuation I am able to see your success in the *kani varkam*.

Case O: An anxious mother in her early forties came with her 10 year old son. The son was threatening the mother that he will desert her to join the militants. The mother not knowing what to do had come to the

temple to seek advice. Amman after listening to her answered as follows;

Amman: Your son is small and young, he has a bad period now and this will continue for some more time.

Gave holy ash.

Case P: Male seventy five years, the client appears to be known to Amman, the son was in custody for six years and on his release managed to send him to a foreign country. Even there the boy suffered for want of a job.

Amman : Are you worried about your son?

Father : He has neither a job nor money. On receiving this message I sent him money (he started sobbing) but he has not received it.

Amman : You should not send money enclosed in a letter.

Father : No, we sent it through people who travelled to the country where he lived.

Amman : You send him again, he will receive it, he is not having any problems regarding his food.

She offers holy ash and dismisses him.

Comment

The last three cases reflect the present anxieties related to the new socio-political atmosphere. The limitations on university entrance, many intelligent students, come to the aid of the goddess. The impact of the new political norms on land ownership, and thirdly, the threat given by children of either sexes to join the militant groups poses a big threat to the present day parents in this peninsula.

Case Q: Male, sixty years old.

Amman : Have you come to ask about you or about your children?

Did you lend money to someone and is not able to get it?

Are you concerned about your savings?

Did you bury your savings somewhere and unable to find it now?

The man nods his head to indicate a negative answer, he confides that he has not received his pension since his retirement from service six years ago, and he is

finding it difficult to meet the family budget in present day Jaffna where things are expensive or are scarce in the market.

Amman : Didn't I ask you about the savings?

Man : I am worried whether I will receive the pension in time?

Ammana: Confirms that there is indication that you will have to wait for another four to five months before you receive it.

When you receive your pension, I hope you will give also to the goddess.

With these words she dismisses the man offering holy ash.

Comment

The pension department in modern Sri Lanka delays giving pensions to those entitled, and the lack of communication between Jaffna and Colombo further increases the problem.

Case R : My family (the researcher), consisting of my mother, sister, wife and myself. My mother had taken a ticket for my sister only, but predictions were given for all the members during the interview. Looking at my sister, she foretold as follows,

Amman : You are concerned about your education, disturbed in between, changed from one field to another, you are shedding tears for the last three years and wondering whether it is a consequence of your fate or planetary afflictions.

You are stubborn, you will not easily believe what is told to you. Everything will become alright. There is a Murugan temple to the South-East, make a *nerti* and place *pattu* (silk cloth) as *kanikai*. Place a *nerti* for me also.

Amman asked, how many siblings are there in our family, she made a guess from five, three and four, my sister denied all this said that we are only two.

Amman: I gave wrong numbers only to test you.

It is at this time she introduced the rest of the family members to the other clients, she continued to deal with them. From this moment we turned from observes to participant observers. She turned to my mother and said,

Amman: Even if you are sick, without concerning about it, you worry about your children only. You are anxious to have a baby Krishnan before you die.

You lost your husband quite early in life. Did he pass away when your son was very young?

Mother : No.

Amman : Did he pass away six years ago?

Mother : Yes.

Amman : Was he fifty six years old when he died?

Mother : No, he was sixty seven years.

She now diverted her attention from my mother and turned to my wife and asked me also to come forward and looking at my wife asked,

Amman : Are there six siblings in your family?

Wife : No.

Amman : three boys, balance girls?

Wife : No.

Amman : two boys and the rest girls?

Wife : Yes.

Amman : Did your marriage take place all of a sudden?
If I come as an old woman or a cobra will you give me food?

She now turns to me and said,

Worship godess Durga in the form of Cobra and you will be rewarded.

Few more case interviews.

I shall now give below a few more interviews, about the temple by selecting focused sampling.

Case A : Male, Post Master, aged forty eight, two children of school going age, he gave a detailed account of the early stages of the temple.

Manonmanie according to him, suffered from one illness or other, but no doctor was able to cure her. She therefore placed her trust in God and visited the temple at Pokkady, it is here she became possessed. She still visits this temple on Tuesdays and Fridays, here too she makes astrological predictions to the many devotees who come there (Navaratnam nor Manonmanie never divulged this during my interview).

It was in a possesed state she declared, the need for a temple in the colony. She also said, that, the temple will be constructed in her plot of land close to the margosa.

Initially a stone was used to symbolize the goddess, and a shed was put up to protect her from the sun and the rain. In this temple too, she continued with her *kaddu chollal* (predicting).

When I asked him about the *kamandalam*, he refrained from answering, he however admitted that the devotees including himself had full faith in the goddess. He is also not too happy over the temple construction, particularly the *vimanam* over the Sanctum Sanctorum, this he said is a break away from the traditional plan, this is the view of almost all the devotees, he added.

He admired the construction of the *theertha kundu* over night and said that the power of the goddess is seen here.

He admitted that he was never a Durga *pakthan*, He had visited the Tellippalai Durga temple only once and that too on his way to the hospital. However after the construction of the Mirusuvil temple he became a fully convinced Durga *pakthan*.

Caste, he said is not a barrier for temple entry here.

Case B : A leading businessman from Mirusuvil, did not want to divulge any details about his family background. He however, had a lot to say about the power of the goddess. According to him, he would be a dead man now, if not for the advise of the goddess. Apparently the goddess appeared in his dream and ordered him to postpone the journey, which he should have commenced the following day. The others with whom he was to have travelled proceeded as scheduled, met with an accident and all of them died on the spot and the lorry was smashed to pieces. There are many of us who come to the temple to ask for the blessings of the goddess before venturing out on a journey.

Case C : A farm labourer, aged fifty from the neighbouring village, Palai. He and his two daughters come to the temple very frequently. The daughters suffer from possession. The father spent a big fortune hoping the sickness will be cured, and he tried almost all the doctors possible but none of them could help him. He therefore changed his approach and instead requested the godess to see to their problems. He said that the goddess

did answer his request and from then on they became regular visitors to the temple.

The goddess appears in his dream in the form of an old lady dressed in white and walking with the aid of a walking stick. He no longer suffers from possession but occasionally enters into a trance, and in this state, he sees the goddess in the form of 'Manonmanie'. The daughters at this time joined the discussion and one of them remarked "when father is in trance, his face turns out to be frightening and even we are scared to look at him." The man added, that at this time he gets the feeling of being squeezed from all sides.

The two daughters are concerned about their marriage and they are hopeful that the goddess will give them husbands.

Case D : Male, aged 36, Carpenter from Nelliady, about 10-14 miles from the temple site in the Vadamaradchchi division of the Peninsula.

He had a flourishing business for about 10 years. The neighbours were jealous of him and took to sorcery as a means to ruin his business and his income. The man was shocked over this dramatic decline in his business, but being an atheist did not want to go to the temple or ask for help from the supernatural powers. He continued to suffer and his family had no choice but to remain in silence. An astrologer advised him to have the pictures of Vishnu, Murugan, Laksmi, Hanuman and Narada and pray to them, this he did, as he was keen to restore his name in the business market. Many of his friends advised him to go to the Durga temple and ask her blessings, he was very reluctant to take this advise. A few days later he was forced to enter the temple premises in connection with his work. Once he reached the outer courtyard he saw Manonmanie standing right across the garden and watching every step of his. She addressed him and said, "You are now suffering because an enemy of yours practiced sorcery against you and had buried a part of your hair and clothes under your machine. You should have this removed by a good magician, once this is done everything will be alright for you". The man was shocked, he took very serious note of what Manonmanie said. The magician was called to remove the sorcery and after this he showed signs of recovery. But he was unable to have a happy family life with the wife as before, he appeared very depressed as a result. At this stage, he had no choice but to go to the temple and

ask for the grace of the goddess, which he failed to do up to now. A few days after this, he had a dream, in this dream he saw the vehicle of the goddess, *Karampasu*, a female cow with a face of a woman, feeding its young. At the same time, Manonmanie also appeared in the dream rather she had the trident in her hand and said that he would be blessed with a child soon. The next day, he came to the temple with his wife, where he received *Vipoothy* from Manonmanie, who tied the sacred thread around the wrist of the husband and wife, she also gave them words of comfort. After this, he admitted that a dramatic change occured in his life and little by little he was able to capture the business market he had lost. From then, he became a devotee of the goddess and very religious as well. Durga always appeared to him in the loving form, but not Manonmanie, who always appeared with a frightful face, in fact he admitted that he was scared of her. He related many myths associated with Durga, Manonmanie and the temple but there is one that needs special attention. His wife had apparently lit the fire to cook the days meal and without proceeding with her work stood motionless in front of the fire. He, therefore peeped to see what the matter was and to his surprise, saw the image of the goddess amidst the flames, and seeing this he fell flat and prayed to the goddess, since then he said that things have improved for him, and he is now happy.

Case E: A female, aged forty with children, husband is in the Middle-East and the family is financially well of.

The lady became a devotee of the goddess, ever since her husband went to the Middle-east. Initially her family had a lot of financial problems, and she prayed in silence asking the goddess for foreign employment for her husband. She made a vow that if the husband is successful, she would visit the temple every Tuesdays and observe the special rituals. In about six months time the husband received a job as a machine operator in the Middle-East. The family life style changed from then on, and they lead a happy life. In gratitude, the mother comes to the temple every Tuesday and very solemnly observes the *elumichchampala villakku* ritual.

She does not visit any other temple and she is contended that everything is available in the Mirusuvil temple and therefore there is no need for her to go anywhere else. The goddess in the temple, she said is in the *Satvic*

form, while Manonmanie gives a frightening appearance to most of her devotees, she said.

This lady initially lived in Colombo and subsequently had come to live in Mirusuvil, her native place. She had no complaints nor praise for Manonmanie and her husband, but she said they never demanded any money from the devotees.

Case F: Man in his early forties, works for the Telecommunication, wife is a school teacher, have two children, a boy eight years old and the girl five years old.

Both husband and wife visit the temple since the *Kumbaabishekam*. The goddess to them is a mighty one and very powerful. They had no good words for Manonmanie nor her husband. Her possessed state and her astrological predictions have destroyed the Agamic traditions of the temple, he said. He further said that nearly all the devotees coming to the temple are possessed by some form of a ghost.

The wife remarked that although a large number come to the temple with some form of affliction or other, only a very small number are cured by the treatment given by Manonmanie.

According to her, temple trustees are dishonest and they make money by exaggerating the number of persons who have been cured after taking treatment from them. The husand and wife are not at all happy about the folk traditions that are in practice. To them this is against Agamic traditions.

They were also critical about the Priest in charge of the religious rituals. They also did not like the depressed caste people coming into the temple. As far as the goddess is concerned they said that goddess is either in the *satvic* or the *ghora* form, and this to them is associated with the way in which they look at the goddess.

Case G: Male, aged thirty five, school teacher with two children and a young wife who is also a teacher.

This man was very critical of the way in which the temple is managed and of the rituals practiced in the temple. He did not believe in the myth relating to the *kamandalam* nor the one where the goddess is said to have given instruction through Manonmanie for the construction of the temple. He condemned the management for giving prominence to

sorcery and the like in the temple premises. He feared that this might affect the village in the long run. He was also critical over the manner in which Manonmanie and her husband Navaratnam acted to frighten the devotees and almost forcing them to accept the words of Manonamanie as that of the goddess. The devotees were scared not to believe her for they feared that the curses of the goddess might bring them to misfortune. In support of his arguments he referred to the comment made by Kailasanatha Kurukkal, a Professor of Hindu Civilization and who is often quoted as the authority on Hinduism. This learned Professor appeared to have criticized the rituals associated with sorcery, and the ill effects that it is going to have on the people in the years to come, he stated.

4. Nayanmarkaddu Durga Temple

Origin and Development

This temple is owned by a single individual by the name of Sambasiva Kurukkal. The present temple is said to be in existence since 1958, but according to the Priest, the temple is about three hundred years old.

In fact, a Vairavar temple had been in existence at this site for a very long time. The image of the goddess was added to the temple only in the late 1950s. After this, the temple came to be referred to as Pathini - Vairavar *Kovil*.

Adjacent to the temple is a hospital, owned by a Christian family and the temple management has continuous disputes with the hospital owners.

In the beginning the temple was very small with only a tin sheet as the roof. According to Sambasiva Kurukkal, some years back he happened to pass this way late in the night and on that day he saw a very tall figure, tall as the tallest palmyrah trees, standing in front of him. The figure wore the traditional *Vesti* and Shawl and stood staring at him. He was frightened and not knowing what to do, sat down to keep away from the staring face. However, he could not remain still anymore, for all of a sudden he heard a loud voice requesting him to cherish him in the Vairavar temple. The Priest could not ignore this request nor was he happy to go ahead with the request made. He therefore decided to discuss with the temple authorities to examine the possibility of abiding to the request made to him. It is after this a more permanent building was put up. The present temple is small but very attractive. The *Kumbaabishekam* was celebrated according to Agamic traditions.

Since then, the number of devotees visiting the temple increased, the hospital authorities did not like this and they did all that they could to make it difficult for the Priest and the devotees. They blocked the only pathway available to enter the temple. The hospital authorities even ordered that the image of the goddess should be removed from their land for they claimed ownership of the land in which the temple was constructed. The management ignored the demand and even went a step further to prove that the land actually belonged to the temple. In fact they even claimed that the hospital is built in the land belonging to the temple. He was able to prove this by reference to the temple deed that was available with a gentleman living in Saravanai, an island, in north-western coast of the peninsula. Even after this the hospital authorities felt otherwise and continued to create problems for the priest and they were all out to destroy the temple. But in the end, it is the hospital party that suffered both physically and economically. It is only after this that they began to act wisely and they decided to settle the dispute amicably with the temple management. The Priest claimed that this is all the work of the goddess.

Rituals

As far as the temple festivals and rituals are concerned, *Agamic* traditions are strictly followed and there is no room for new rituals. In fact, Sambasiva *Kurukkal* raised his protest against these new rituals. However, Tuesday is observed as a special day, and the image of the Goddess Durga is taken in procession around the temple. The image taken in procession is made from a mixture of five metals including gold, donated by the priest himself. The goddess taken in procession is in the *bogha* form and carries in her hands the *chanku* and the *Cacara*. She wears a crown of gold with glittering diamonds while taken in procession.

I visited this temple on three occasions, and became quite familiar with the Priest and we had long discussions and was therefore in a position to gather sufficient information relating to Durga worship and about the temple itself. I shall now refer to some of the facts narrated by the Priest. The Priest first and foremost very reluctantly confided that during the puja he identifies himself with the goddess. In other words the goddess is he, and he is the goddess. He further said that, the goddess at times resembles his mother and on other occasions his first wife who died some years back.

The Priest is educated, a scholar in Sanskrit and at the same time a very popular Ayurvedic doctor. He is famous for *seivinai* cutting, the most crudest and a severe form of sorcery. He is the author of many devotional songs and books on mother goddess worship, particularly about Goddess Durga. Sambasiva *Kurukkal* initially

worked as the chief Priest at Nainativu Amman Kovil. He said that even as a Priest at this temple, he often dreamt of the goddess and in one such dream saw the goddess walking out of the Sanctum Sanctorum towards the temple well but when he approached her, the goddess simply vanished from the scene. The priest with his scholastic abilities certainly made him a well recognized priest in the peninsula.

He was very critical about the new rituals and particularly about the *Elumichchampla Villakku*. He said that there was no reference about it or about its significance in any one of the religious texts. He also remarked that it was wrong to practice any religious activities which had no significance. He totally rejected the idea of introducing these at his Durga temple for he feared that this might bring in the low caste members into the inner temple. He abhorred the idea of the high caste having to sit side by side with the low caste during the ritual. He was very particular that the caste purity be maintained in all walks of life, so that he prefer not to use public transport for fear of being polluted.

The Priest, I found is deeply buried in conservative ideas and he expects all the devotees who visit this temple also to fall in line with his ideas. He is so convinced with his ideas that he would not want his school going son to cut his hair, instead he wanted him to tie it in a knot like all traditional *brahmins*. The son resented this and when he cut his hair against the wishes of his father, was declared an outcaste and thrown out of the family. This led the boy to give up his studies, and he became a popular '*Villu pattu*' artist (a folk art) and earns a good income. The other children have all followed the foot steps of their father, and holds prestigious positions as temple priests, who are also engaged in some form of social activities. One of the daughters is popular for her religious discourses. One of this sons is Iyappathasan, a popular priest in Colombo and his activities will be refered to in the later part of this chapter. It is however, worth pointing out here, that, he is largely responsible for the introduction of the new rituals related to Durga in Colombo, and for that matter in the other parts of the country as well.

I discussed with the priest in detail about the Goddess Durga, particularly in relation to her as Vishnu Durga. He has quite a different explanation and according to him once the goddess is supposed to have fasted and at the end of the fast was blessed by Vishnu and it is from then on that she is referred to as Vishnu Durga. He further added that Kannaki, Bhagawathy and Durga are all identical, but he was unable to substantiate his ideas with any form of written evidence.

The type of people coming to the temple vary from those who request for husbands, cure from illness, recovery of lost property, protection against sorcery and the like.

During my visits, I was able to note a number of mentally affected persons coming for treatment. In all cases, he always applied *vipoothy* on the forehead of the patient concerned before prescribing the medicine.

The priest daily observes Sakti *puja* particularly Shri *Cacara puja*. He said that this is conducted for the well being of his family, friends, devotees, patients and particularly that Sakti will bring back peace to the North of Shri Lanka from where peace has been lost for the last fifteen years or more. He added with enthusiasm as follows, 'I always asked for her grace particularly when there is a direct confrontation between the two forces, and prayed for justice. He fasted for twenty seven days and requested her to bless the people and the region. He is confident that it is only Goddess Durga who can protect the people and the region from the horrible effects of the present situation.

Sambasiva *Kurukkal* is the president of the newly formed Association of the Priest, he is thus a trade union leader now.

5. Sirupiddy Vishnu Durga Temple

Origin and Development

This temple is situated on the Jaffna-point Pedro road, the main entrance of the temple faces east, and a very conspicuous name board is placed at the entrance to the temple.

The temple was built in 1984, and the *Kumbaabisheka* ceremony was also observed in the same year. The temple owner is a businessman, and has a small grocery shop of his own close to the temple.

The myth relating to the origin of the temple

The present owner of the temple like any other shop keeper, kept pictures of gods and goddesses in the shop and paid homage to them every day before commencing the business. The picture of the Goddess Durga was kept in the middle. The owner said, that this goddess always watched him while attending to his duty and therefore he became a devotee of the goddess. His success in business, he attributed it to the blessing of the goddess. He was therefore, keen to have a temple constructed for the goddess in the neighbourhood of his shop. But he died in 1984.

While in the shop, it appears he had fainted on several occasions and after one such incident became possessed by the goddess, and since then he began to predict and a number of devotees began to flock to him to seek advise and remedy.

His wife is possessed by the Murugan of *Sannithy* and she too predicts to many devotees who come to her.

It is interesting to note here, during the *puja* recorded music from *Uddukku* is played and the owner remarked that this brings a saving by not bringing a person for money. The owner of the temple has always been functioning as the Priest but since the time of the *Kumbaabishekam* has hired a Priest to attend to this and paid him a sum of rupees six hundred. This owner is not satisfied with his work, yet the Priest also cannot complain for the temple's income is very small, and is only rupees three hundred and fifty per month. It therefore amounts to the owner having to subsidize out of his own money and in addition spend for the temple expenses as well.

The owner finding it almost impossible to manage the temple on his own has appointed a committee to manage the temple. Even this appears to be rather unsatisfactory, for he cannot give up his commanding habits. It has therefore become necessary to limit the number of *puja* to three times on Tuesdays and Fridays and only once on other days.

I had a long discussion with the owner of the temple and found that he had no idea about the image in the Sanctum Sanctorum. The image, he said, is that of Vishnu Durga. There were two images available in the temple, one with the *Chanku* and *Cacara* and while the other image carried the Trident and the *Kapalam*. As far as he is concerned, he is an ardent devotee of Vishnu residing at Vallipuram Vishnu Kovil, and being so he named the goddess at Siruppiddy as Vishnu Durga. He also said that he was anxious to have Durga for he was a devotee of Durga from a long time, and this is why he had the picture of the goddess in his shop as well.

He also spoke to me about his family. He has five children, three boys and two girls, of whom the elder two sons are employed in Kuwait and his daughter is already married. He is now living at home with his wife and the younger daughter and son. He is financially well off, however he is rather reluctant to spend his own money towards the temple expenses. He has, it appears spent about rupees three lakhs towards the construction of the temple. He is now reluctant to spend any more of his money on this temple.

5.3: Durga in the Depressed Caste Corners of Jaffna

1. Alwai Jaya's Durga Temple

The temple is located in a remote corner of Alwai. Here too, as in the Mirusuvil temple, a lady by the name of Jeyaranie Sivapatham in her late twenties is the key

figure who is also possessed by Durga. The majority of the people around the temple belong to the *Pallar* community. The temple is very small and Jeyaranie is the owner of the temple. Within the temple there are pictures and images of Durga given to her by her *guru* Chinniah Appu.

When Jeyaranie was asked to give some particulars relating to the goddess within the temple, she was not able to give any information, and further almost ignorant about the images she had in the shrine room. She gave me permission to examine the goddess, and I found the goddess to be having *changu*, *cacara* and a Trident. To my surprise she admitted that was the first day when she herself had examined the deity in such detail.

Jeyaranie enter into a possessed state on Fridays and Sundays, and in this state she gives blessings to the devotees, cut *seivinai*, sorcery a spell passed on someone by an enemy. She also gives astrological predictions. The *seivinai* cutting ritual begins about 5 p.m. and would go on till late in the night. Apart from these two days she is an ordinary housewife and a mother of three young children. She was all in praises for Chinniah Appu who gave her the opportunity to serve the people through the goddess.

It was Chinniah Appu who helped her to put up the temple structure. The mere act of getting into the possessed state is also a blessing from her *guru*, she confessed.

Jeyaranie in her teenage was a victim of an unusual disease, and none of the village doctors could cure her. She used to enter into a trance and in this state her ears become blocked and her eyes blurred and her whole body shiver as if suffering from high fever. At this time, she experiences a burning sensation of her whole body. Having no cure for this from the medical doctors, the anxious parents took her to Chinniah Appu.

Chinniah Appu examined Jeyaranie very carefully and immediately proclaimed that she was possessed by the Goddess, Durga. He applied *Vipoothi* all over her body and gave her some medicine orally. This cured her, however she was warned by Chinniah Appu that she should remain loyal to the goddess if she wanted to maintain good health. It was after this incident that he gave her the image of the goddess and helped her to establish the temple.

The day I visited the temple, it was about 4 p.m. and fifty to sixty devotees had already gathered at the temple. About ten pesons were from distant places. My wife and I were treated as special guests and Jeyaranie even came forward to advance the *puja* to 5.30 p.m. so that we could return home in time. She excused herself and

returned to her house adjoining the temple and in a few minutes returned prepared for the *puja*. Her husband, dressed like a priest joined us in readiness for the rituals.

The rituals are conducted in quite a different way at this temple. During the *puja* no *mantras* are recited. There is no bell, in the temple and it is the opinion of the management that it is not necessary to ring the bell during the *puja*. During the *puja*, the devotees were seen singing *Thevarams*, religious lyrics composed by three *Nayanmar*, namely Manikavasagar, Sundarmoorthy *Nayanar*, and Thirunavukkarasu *Nayanar*.

The husband priest waved the lit oil lamps one after the other in front of the goddess. At this time Jeyaranie appeared in front of the goddess and proclaimed her arrival in a big loud voice, laughed loudly and clapped her hands forcibly enough to be heard right round the crowd. She immediately announced that very soon *Navaratri* festival will be celebrated and the devotees should contribute and participate to make it a success. Following this, she identified each devotee and began to give predictions, and when it came to the devotees who were sick she gave prescriptions in a loud voice. This was written down by a female child about twelve years old and she handed the prescription chit to the patient concerned. The prescribed medicine usually consisted of herbs, fruits and even vegetables. In between, Jeyaranie made certain unusual sounds always in a high pitch. This, as far as I was able to gather is given below. The words have no meaning but sounded like mantras.

> " Dikkri Sithy..... Thaithu..... Vedakara
> Sithy Akira..... Sithy Akatiya Sithy.....
> Kala Keratiya"

Between words there was always a pause, during which time she pretended to think before the next word.

Jeyaranie did not like her customers going to any other doctor, particularly those with qualifications in the practice on western medicine. She would always get their consent to this before commencing treatment, anyone breaking this consent will not be allowed in the temple again. People come to her with all kinds of illness, like fever, pains, childlessness, possession and the like.

I shall give below a small sample of the devotees who patronize this temple; (Plate 5.8)

Case A: A mother in her early twenties and carrying a sick child. On seeing her, Jeyaranie asked whether the child felt better after the last treatment

The mother gave a negative answer, next she asked whether she had been to any other doctor in town, meaning a doctor who pratices western medicine and continued "Thu thu thu ..... sithu...kara...veda kura" and laughed loudly. The mother kept silent throughout and Jeyaranie in an angry voice asked whether she followed all instructions given and only to this question the mother nodded her head. A smile beamed across the face of Jeyaranie and she now applied *Vipoothy* and tied the sacred thread around the waist of the child and said in a low voice "everything will be alright soon". In the meantime she asked the girl to come forward to write down the prescription and continued as follows

Sithamparatham Poo two (shoe flower), Thennangkurumbai two (young coconut), *Milaku* three (pepper seeds) boil all these together with five cups of water and give the decotion three times a day to the child until the fever subsides.

Case B: A mother with an eight year child, who was later introduced to me as Jeyaranie's sister.

In a rude voice she asked the mother whether she followed all instructions given to her on the last occasion. The mother began to shiver, probably through fear and confessed that she took the child to a western doctor. Jeyaranie became very angry and shouted at the mother,

"Why did you now come here, you had better go to the same doctor and turned away" The mother sobbed at this, Jeyaranie turned back and said,

" I forgive you, now take this medicine and give it to the child three times a day.....ha. ha.. vada...kara...Kara" stopped suddenly and have a pathetic look at the child.

Case C : The same mother now brought another child about 6 years old. This child is no other than that of Jeyaranie herself. In spite of this, the same questions were asked and medication was given with the same ceremony, amidst the usual sounds she makes.

Towards the end of the day, Jeyaranie finished giving her blessings to every devotee who was at the temple irrespective of their age or social status. In my interview, she admitted that she remembered nothing of what happened during the puja. This, she said, is her experience every time she becomes possessed. In fact, it looked a bit

difficult to believe for she could not even remember that her son was brought for treatment.

Jeyaranie admitted that she had no education, what she speaks in the possessed state is the impact of the power given to her by the goddess. Even the medicine she prescribes is the work of Durga, using her as the vehicle for communicating with her devotees. She confessed that she is only a tool in the hands of the goddess and without her power she is no one.

The devotees who come to this temple, particularly those who come with physical or mental problems are frightened to ask any questions nor do they feel free to consult another doctor. They simply do not want to antagonize the goddess in any way. The sister of Jeyaranie admitted that her daughter is dumb, and after taking treatment from the temple, she is able to say few words. The mother said that she was confident that in the near future, she is going to be like any other child of her age. Many of the devotees who came that day expressed the same feelings, and in this regard one could sense a community feeling among them and they were concerned about the development of the temple and their community.

The devotees who talked to me felt happy that I had covered a distance of twelve miles on a Chally from Nallur and come to their temple. In a few minutes they became very friendly with us and cooperated well in recording sessions.

The youth of the area impressed me very much and they were hopeful of a bright future and in this regard one of them remarked 'the goddess is going to be with us, the war situation will vanish soon and we are going to be happy, all of us including you'.

The youths have established a library for them and their next move is to build a bigger temple for the goddess. They are keen to raise the social status of their people, which the high caste *Vellalar* find it difficult to swallow. In this regard, it must be said that the people who come to this temple are from the neighbouring villages and mostly from the depressed caste groups. In fact the high caste *Vellalar* scorned at us for coming to this temple all the way from Nallur.

Chinniah Appu, Guru of Jeyaranie and his Sivan temple at Keyavodai.

Periyan Chinniah is about fifty seven years old, is from the *Pallar* community and is the guru of Jeyaranie. Chinniah patronizes a Sivan temple which is situated in Puloly West. He became possessed by Sivan, supreme in the Hindu pantheon, is an unusual event and he continues to be in this state from more than twenty five years. In his younger days he worked as a coolie in the village and during his spare time, visited the *Sudalai*, cemetery. It is here that he became possessed by Sivan. He received his blessings during one such visit. Whenever he entered into the possessed state, people, including his friends laughed at him and called him mad. He also says that, the day he was blessed by Siva, he had told him, that in his previous birth he lived in Kalingapuri and was an ardent worshipper of him. He further said, that the God Siva had blessed him in this birth too.

The devotees who come to this temple are largely for medical treatment. Their illness vary from a simple headache to incurable diseases, and a few others come to have their *seivinai* cut. (Plate 5.9) The latter ritual is very popular in this temple. Most of the patients who come to Chinniah Appu are those who failed to be cured in a hospital, but a few do come directly to him without going anywhere else. Jeyaranie had come initially as a patient to this temple. After repeated visits, her illness was cured and subsequently she was advised by Chinniah Appu to worship the Goddess Durga to maintain good health. When I asked Chinniah Appu about Jeyaranie, he said that she was born with Durga in her, meaning that Jeyaranie had the Durga *Amsam*, (aspects of Durga) within her. It is only after recognizing this, that he had blessed her and given her pictures and the image of Durga in order to have a temple of her own in her village.

Jeyaranie was poor and therefore he helped her financially to construct the temple. He finally said,

> "Jeya is doing well and is an ardent devotee of the Goddess Durga and I am proud of her".

The image he gave her is the goddess with *changu*, *cacara* and the trident. He claims that, this is a powerful face of Durga and, this had helped Jeyaranie to become popular. He further said that there are occasions where Jeyaranie is unable to deal with illness, she never fails to send them to me.

The rituals conducted in this temple are identical to those of Alwai temple, managed by Jeyaranie. When the devotees gather in large numbers and as the

puja is on, Chinniah Appu will get into a trance and call a few patients to come forward, and they are the ones who receive attention for that day. A small girl is employed by him to do clerical work and also to maintain the crowd in an orderly manner.

Just prior to *puja*, this girl will address the crowd and instruct them to take their position before the shrine and to approach Chinniah Appu one by one without disturbing him. This girl announced, that on a previous occasion they had not listened to her advise and thus disturbed Chinniah Appu, when he was unable to give predictions, nor treat the patients. She also said, that the devotees should not have any fear. All communications will be informed to each one of them in writing. She also added that since the women devotees were very rude last time, Chinniah Appu will not take their cases this time. At this juncture, Chinniah Appu arived and in a loud voice said.

"It is true that I was hurt last time when a number of female devotees shouted at each other. I do not like this. Although I decided not to entertain the women, I will forgive you, but remember, that you do not repeat the same".

Suddenly he shook his head several times, laughed loudly and within seconds he entered into trance and sooner he started predicting, both to men and women as they come one behind the other. This went on till midnight and now he was ready for the *seivinai* cutting ritual.

I shall now discuss below a few case studies undertaken at this temple;

Case A : A female, aged 43 from Nelliaddy.

This lady suffered from a stomach ailment and the treatment taken in the hospital did not cure her. She heard about Chinniah Appu and came to this temple. This was her third visit. When Chinniah Appu saw her, he asked her whether she followed strictly all the instructions given to her, sprinkled holy water in the house, and the number of times she did it. The lady however gave no answers; and continued to remain silent. Chinniah Appu further asked whether she buried the charm given by him in the compound as instructed along the boundary where the *seivinai* by the enemy is planted.

Chinniah Appu laughed loudly and said,

"Patini decree.....sithirini and ..... ha.... ha .... why do you hesitate to talk, answer my question ..... how many

times did you sprinkle the holy water ..... on Tuesday before Friday".

She gave a reply in a very faint voice. He became more angry and shouted as follows;

"Why are you frightened?..... how many times have you come here? .... so why hesitate to answer? How many times did you sprinkle the holy water? don't lie to me, I am ageless and my memory is very good, now be good and answer my questions".

The lady started to think and folding her fingers one by one counted three and answered "Three times a day". At this stage like Jeyaranie he asked for the *eluthani* and requested the girl to record the prescriptions given by him. He added,

"You are suffering due to *seivinai* and a bad planetary period, I gave you white water to sprinkle and black water to drink, have you followed my instructions, if you have followed my instructions you should have been alright by now".

He now turned his attention to the next person and in the meantime, the girl who was recording the prescription given by Chinniah Appu handed the chit to the lady. I examined it and found it to read as follows,

'Lime one, salt two, *Sithamparathampoo* four, brinjal one; boil all this in six glasses of water and drink the *decoction* three times a day for three days'.

Case B: A female, aged 32 from the same village.

This lady visits the temple every week accompanied by a girl in her early twenties. When Chinniah Appu saw her he said,

"Your problems are going to vanish soon, this will take place with changes in the planetary position. Are you drinking the water I gave you? This girl who is in your custody needs you very much and you will have to look after her for a very long time, so do it".

The said girl is from Batticaloa. She has been employed as a servant, but when her employers left the country she found shelter in this lady's house and decided

to stay there until she finds her way to Batticaloa. However, her family members are keen that she continues to be in Jaffna until they call her back.

The lady has been coming to this temple for over six months asking the goddess to give her brother back. The brother had been taken away by the forces. She is hopeful that her brother will come back and Chinniah Appu gave her hopes and said,

"Your brother will come back soon".

Case C : A female, aged 25.

She came to find out about her marriage and Chinniah Appu told her,

"Your planetary period is now very much better, and you should be getting married soon".

After a while he asked whether she took the medicine as instructed. Very reluctantly, she answered 'Yes'. Chinniah Appu realizing the reluctance said in an angry voice.

"how can you get better if you do not follow the instruction given to you".

The girl at this stage agreed to follow all instructions.

He now called the girl for *eluthani* to write down the prescription which is as follows,

Sithamparatham Poo four, brinjal three, Uppu two, Kurincha two, Mossu *Mossakai* four; to boil all these and drink the decoction three times a day for three days.

Comments:

In these temples, Jeyaranie's Durga temple and Chinniah Appu's Sivan temple, one could see identical practices, not only in the rituals but also in the meaningless words used, during predictions. The medicine prescribed has no significance, as the herbs are selected at random.

Both Chinniah Appu and Jeyaranie had no idea about the goddess Durga nor about her significance as Siva Durga or Vishnu Durga. Both of them are from the depressed caste groups. Their kith and kin consider them as great persons with the blessings of the gods and goddesses, and it is this community feeling, which has in many ways contributed to their popularity.

Although Durga is now very popular and holds an esteemed position for thousands of Hindus in the peninsula, yet because these two temples are in the depressed caste

area, and being the property of them the high castes living close by are hesitant to patronize these temples.

2. Vadakovai Shanti Durga Temple

This is another temple in the depressed caste corner, between Neervely and Kopay. The temple is located within the palmyrah groove, and it can be reached only along a foot path.

In the beginning, the temple was a mere shed with pictures of the gods and goddesses. In the course of time, the devotees got together and constructed a permanent structure. Once the Sanctum Sanctorum was completed, *kumbaabishekam* was carried out, and the villagers are very proud of their temple though it's small. They have plans to construct inner and outer court yards, and have collected the material necessary for this. The building programme is postponed for want of money.

The new rituals conducted are very popular with the devotees. The day I visisted the temple, the ladies were getting ready for the *Thiruvillakku puja*. Just as in Tellippalai Durga temple, here too, married and unmarried ladies participate in this *puja*, though it is meant for the married ladies asking for the blessings of the goddess for a sustained married life. There were cases, where the mother and the unmarried daughter participated in the *puja* together.

The details of the *puja* and other paraphernalia associated with the event are very identical to that in the bigger temples. Here the crowd was small, consisting of only about twenty to twenty five females observing this. A microphone was operated by means of a cycle dynamo with much difficulty.

The cyclist became tired and had to pause in between in order to regain his breath. It may be said that the *puja* was finally finished amidst a disturbed atmosphere due to this microphone. The officiating priest addressed the gathering exactly in the same manner as Thangammah would do at Tellippalai.

The temple being small, with only a shrine room for the goddess the entire ritual was conducted in the open space.

The ladies were seated on a mat, woven for the ceremony from processed palmyrah leaves. The wife of the temple manager was also given prominence, she enjoyed the privilege of using a larger *kuthuvillakku*. The ladies found it a difficult task to keep the lit oil lamps burning, particularly when there was heavy blowing in the open air. In fact they were more concerned about it and little about the *mantra* recited or that to be recited by them. Those observing this ritual in the bigger temples, faced no

problem of this nature as the rituals were conducted in the inner courtyard immediately in front of the goddess. It may be said that the participants experienced great difficulties in going through the whole process, but their determination and will power to develop themselves and their community gave them the strength needed to overcome all difficulties. Though the temple was small and poor, the ladies wore glamorous saries almost equivalent to that of Tellippalai, which is a notable feature.

3. Keelamoolai, Kaddudai Durga Temple

Keelamoolai Durga temple is situated in a depressed caste corner on the Manipay-Vaddukoddai road, close to the popular Seerani Nagapooshani Amman temple. The origin of this temple is surrounded with myths. The management at present is in the hands of a lady who is a devotee at Tellippalai Durga. Like any other Durga devotee, she observes Tuesday as a fasting day and practices all the rituals associated with it. She referred to an incident that occured on the sixth Tuesday of her fast. When she was returning home after the rituals, her little son wanted some sweets, so they walked to a shop, selling sweets. The little boy by accident knocked down the bottle of sweets, which fell to the ground and broke ito pieces. The owner of the shop became very angry and demanded her to pay damages. This made her very unhappy and she did not go to Tellippalai Durga temple, the following Tuesday and this happened to be the last day. It appears that Durga came in the form of a snake and spoke to her and said,

"I watched the snake and it looked at me and said that I should construct a temple for her at Keelamoolai amidst the panankoodal under the huge tamarind tree. The *Amman* further informed me that she would also reside at this temple in Keelamoolai, and that I should not worry any more".

According to this lady, on the same night *Vipoothy* and sandalwood paste started to pour out from the same tamarind tree. In fact I remember having read articles relating to this, in one of the local papers, Elanadu. This news item according to the lady, attracted a large number of people to the site who gave *kanikai* in cash and kind to requested the lady to put up a building for the goddess and that they woud find the money needed for this.

In the course of time, a temple was constructed under the same tamarind tree. Within the shrine room there is no image of Durga, but only two tridents placed side by side, one dressed in a *Verti* and shawl and the other in a saree and blouse, to represent the god and goddess respectively. It is to be recorded here that there are about four possessed persons in the area by one or the other deity. The lady had gone

to one of them immediately after the dream, and it appears that this lady in fact had advised her to put up the temple and she told her the snake in the dream represent Goddess Durga. She also suggested to name the temple as Durga temple.

The day I visited the temple it was around 8 a.m. I introduced myself to her and talked about the purpose of my visit. She said that without the permission of the goddess she will not talk to me. Saying so she returned into the shrine room and prayed for a while, In a few minutes she returned from the shrine room, sat in front of me and prepared herself for the interview. No sooner she took her place, entered into a state of trance and began to talk to me, as follows;

> Education is a means by which one gathers knowledge and this is necessary for ones success. Man is anxious to know about the other world, namely about *Devar* and the gods, and Sakti who is seen in different forms. Although I originated from out of blood, I have come here in the *bogha* form and not in the *ghora* form.
>
> To my devotees who come to me with sorrow, I appear in their dream or give them *darsan* in order to reclaim them of all their sorrows and worries.
> As Sakti, I appear and predict the future of my devotees. I give them peace which they need".

She finally looked straight into my face and asked me,

" Are you satisfied my Kunchchu?"

Strictly saying I was not all satisfied with the answers I received from her. Therefore more reluctantly I asked for how this temple became so popular. She continue to be in the possessed state and said,

" This is an important site for Durga worship, next to is the temple at Tellippalai."

She continued in a very excited state as follows;

"Maha Durga is yet to come and she will come here"

She concluded her interview and when I asked whether photographs were permitted, she answered negatively and I had to leave the temple most disappointed.

Comments

The temple at Vadakovai and Kelamoolai faces the same problems as the ones, at Alwai and Keyavodai.

These temples are unable to develop for want of land and the number of devotees who come to the temple are also small due to caste restriction, the high caste simply abhor the idea of visiting this temple.

5.4 Durga in Colombo

1. Tellippalai Durga in Colombo

1.1 Tellippalai Durga in Karumari Amman Kovil, Panchkawatta

Karamani Amman Temple Panchikwatta is in the suburbs of Colombo, where the poor daily wage earning population lives. The population around this temple chiefly consists of Sinhalese, Muslims and a few Tamils. The deity was initially installed at the foot of the Tamarind tree. The deity has a very crude appearance. Once the tamarind tree was uprooted it became necessary to construct a temple for the goddess. Swaminatha Iyar from kokuvil, Jaffna was responsible for collecting funds and for the construction of the temple. The temple is small but yet all the important festivals are celebrated here, particularly those associated with *Amman* worship. The festivals are attended by a large population, particularly the small businessmen from this area.

It is now about fifteen years old, but in the last five years it has become popular, and the Jaffna population which now resides in Colombo are celebrating the Tellippalai Durga festival at this temple. In the past years, the celebrations took place only on the last two days, but in 1993, all the fifteen days were celebrated at the request of the devotees. Even at this temple one could see the influence of Iyappathasan, who functioned as the officiating priest in 1991 and 1992. On the last day, the deity is taken in procession along the main streets of the area. I attended the temple on the thirteenth day and there were as many as thirty to forty devotees, but I was informed that a very large number would attend the final celebrations. The migrant population from Jaffna are now settled down here in Colombo in lodges, and in annexes. They with their long religious traditions are keen to maintain their customs in their new places of habitation too. It is this urge that resulted in such a celebration at this temple. *Ragukala puja* is observed at this temple on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Even *Thiruvillakku puja* is celebrated on a *Pournamie* day of each month. The priest officiating at these rituals is a *brahmin*. But on the day I visited, in his absence, it was taken over by a non-brahmin, who always help the priest in carrying out the rituals.

The devotees who come to this temple are chiefly the migrant population, and only a very few from the surrounding area do attend the temple. When asked about this,

one elderly person said that it might lead to a lot of problems, and therefore they avoid coming.

1.2. Tellippalai Durga in New Kathiresan Kovil, Wellawatta

This is a Pillayar temple situated in the heart of Wellawatta, popularly known as '*chinna Yalpanam*', meaning mini Jaffna. This area is inhabited by a large population of the Jaffna Tamils, and until very recently almost all the big business centres were in the hands of the Jaffna men.

This temple celebrated the *Ther* festival of the Tellippalai Durga in the last three years by popular request. Here, there is no *Eluntharuli Amman* and therefore the management was not in a position to conduct the deity in a procession. Therefore, devotees had to satisfy themselves by celebrating the day with *Abhishekam* and *puja*. The Hindu Association of Colombo, with the Chief Editor of a Tamil daily as its President, had pressed the management to permit them to celebrate this *Ther* festival. I had the opportunity of talking to him and he expressed his disappointment over this but was hopeful that by next year they will be in a position to have the *Eluntharuli Amman* at this temple. At the time I was able to recognize a portion of the crowd from my home town, Tellippalai, and some more from the other parts of Jaffna. While talking to them I gathered that they were keen to celebrate the festivals they are accustomed to in their new places of residence. They were very anxious to get back to their homeland, but they were scared to get back to their ancestral homes. The situation in Jaffna prevented them from doing so. In this regard one elderly genetleman remarked

> "We have come with the greatest difficulty, let us be here for some time, but we are hopeful that the Durga Devi will take us back to our homeland".

A lady from Sandilipai Jaffna is the *ubayakarar* for this year's festival. She said that the God had appeared in her dream and had demanded that she should take the financial responsibility for the rituals. She has been a regular devotee never failed to attend the anual festival and other rituals at the Tellippalai Durga temple. She is a retired nurse, and her husband is a leading businessman in Colombo. They would have spent about rupees six thousand for the rituals. The importance of celebrating this ritual at this temple was expressed by the popular *Thavil Vithvan* (drum expert) from Jaffna, he said, "the celebrations gave us the feeling that we are in Tellippalai, and Nallur." He felt very happy and tears filled his eyes when he spoke to me.

2. Silver Smith Street Durga Temple, Kotehena

Origin and Development

A Durga temple is present in the heart of Colombo in Kotehena, a busy and crowded area. The people living in this area are of the low income group chiefly Muslims. The temple originally belonging to a single individual, by the name of Ratnavel, a leading businessman and belonging to the *chetty* caste. It is said that the present deity in the sanctum sanctorum is the same as the image which was kept in the shrine room of Ratnavel.

Ratnavel at some stage decided to move out of Silver smith street, where the temple was situated. From then on the temple remained in a neglected state with only a handful of devotees coming to the temple and the income derived also remained low.

Ratnavel never returned to Silver smith street and the shrine room remained neglected for sometime. The people around the area were angry for keeping the temple closed and they decided to run the temple on their own. The mother of one Iyappan Raman of Kerala origin, came forward to do the needful to the deity. She lights the oil lamp and offer flowers to the goddess. Her son always accompanied and helped her in whatever way he could for the effective running of the shrine room. The number of devotees attending the temple remained small and hence the income was also equally small.

Ratnavel, wished to take the deity to the Sivan temple at Mutwal where he thought regular pujas could be offered. Iyappan and a few others strongly objected to this and Ratnavel himself did not wish to act on his own without the permission of the goddess. In order to decide on this, he resort to the traditional method of '*Pookaddi parthhal*' where two separate bundles of flowers wrapped up in banana leaves, one containing red flowers and the other white flowers are placed at the feet of goddess and special *archanai* is performed. At the end of it, the *ubayakarar* is given one of the bundles. If the bundles blessed and returned in this manner contains the white flowers, it is generally considered to have the blessing of the goddess and action to be taken. However, Iyappan would not grant permission even for this and the goddess therefore continued to be at Silver smith street.

In the course of time, Subramaniam a leading businessman in Kotahena, originally from Pungudutivu, an Island off the coast of Jaffna came forward to construct a temple. The temple was constructed at the present site and details for the construction

work was planned in consultation with Thangammah Appacuddy. The temple in all respects is a model of the Tellippalai Durga Temple, however, there are small variation due to want of space. The different shrine rooms for example are not housed according to *agamic* traditions. The Vinayagar and Murugan shrine rooms are placed on the right and left sides of the main shrine room. In a temple built according to *agamic* traditions these two shrine rooms usually occupy a position in the south west and north west respectively.

The management needed money for the construction work, Subramaniam was wise enough and on his advice, the statue of the goddess was taken in procession from temple to temple and around the city of Colombo which brought in a good collection. The temple management, particularly Subramaniyam was anxious to have the *ghora* form of the goddess in the sanctum sanctorum, and the same image on the *vimanam*. Thangammah, however did not like this idea at all and particularly she objected to the *ghora* form of the image in the *vimanam*. The image now on the *vimanam* is that of the goddess in the *bogha* form as that of Tellippalai.

The original temple is over hundred years old, and it remains small to this day with only an inner and outer court yard. The temple is rich but it has no land space for any expansion. The present priest is young and energetic and is trying to provide more space for the temple. He has plans to purchase the land adjoining the temple. The people living here belong to all three communities, and a Muslim family occupies the house on one side of the temple, while the two plots of land on the opposite side belong to two Sinhalese families. They have agreed to sell their property at a very high price. The Muslim family did not like the way in which the temple was expanding, and this Muslim family even demonstrated against this, at the time of the *kumbaabishekam*. The incidents that took place during the *kumbaabishekam* are of sociological interest and is worth recording here.

Kumbaabishekam was held in 1983. A *kumbam* was placed just out-side and in front of the temple, the Muslim who lived in the adjoining house, kicked it with his foot out of rage. The Hindus and the Sinhala Buddhists who came to temple were very angry over this, but due to fear did not protest. However the devotees remained united to make the event a success which lasted for forty days. The devotees consisting of both Tamils and Sinhalese admired the effective manner in which the management had arranged the programme. Some of the devotees to whom I talked had very pleasant memories of the whole programme including the fate of the Muslim referred to earlier.

It appears that this Muslim died the same year suddenly and no one knew the cause of his death. This was followed by the death of his eldest daughter at the age of twenty seven, and in the subsequent year the second daughter also died suddenly. The remaining family members began to worry and even wondered whether their misfortune could be the revenge taken by the goddess against them. This naturally made the goddess more popular and devotees began to visit the temple in such large numbers. However, the temple continued to remain small, in spite of the priest's interest in purchasing more land.

The priests who carried out the rituals also had problems. They had no house to live close by, and in any case their secular life would not permit them to find shelter close to the temple. Therefore they had to travel from far off places, even those who were determined could not last long for they were made uncomfortable by the non-Hindu residents of the temple area, and also the income derived from the temple was not attractive. This situation lasted for seven years and the temple changed from one priest to another and the temple could not prosper under these conditions. In 1990, the present priest, Swaminatha Sharma assumed the position as chief priest of the temple. He is the son of the famous Thuraisamy *Kurukkal* of Maviddapuram, Jaffna. He is a young man with a lot of enthusiasm, and a good religious background. Further he had a first hand knowledge of the rituals carried out at Tellippalai Durga Temple. When he took over the responsibility, introduced radical changes particularly in the rituals conducted which attracted a large number of devotees and the number increased from a mere fifty to five hundred or more.

At the time he assumed duty be received only Rs two per day as income. But now the temple is rich to buy land worth millions of rupees, he had the money for construction work and the goddess is the owner of jewellery worth millions of rupees. He showed us a good crown weighing sixty seven soverigns, costing Rs. three lakhs which was added to the treasure of the temple quite recently. He has also plans to make the weapons of the goddess in gold. These are all made from the contributions given by the devotees, which ranges from Rs. one to ten thousand or even more. The donation list is displayed in the temple.

Rituals and Festivals

The young priest referred to above has contact with Durgai *sithar* of India. It is from him, that he gets the necessary information and advise for the new rituals introduced. The temple is now popular for *Ragukala* puja, *Subashini puja*,

Thiruvillakku puja, Navaratri festival and the like. The income derived increased far beyond the expectations of the management. The Trustee Board which was appointed by the Hindu Cultural Ministry for the Administration of the temple is now keen to take over the administration of the temple into their hands and give the priest a monthly salary. The priest vehemently opposed this, and on the day following the interview I had with Swaminatha Sharma (September 1994) the Board was scheduled to meet to decide on the future of the temple.

The Board of Management of the temple consists of one Kesavarajah as its president (he claims to be a descedant of the Raja Paramparai from India). The treasurer is Balakrishna from the *Chetty* caste and the Secretary is one Sri kanthan, a rich businessman. The other two members are quite young. Recently a hardware merchant from Jaffna is included in this Board of Management. This Board was functioning since 1983, but until 1990 (when this new priest took over) the temple remained unknown even to the residents in Colombo, but now attract a crowd of devotees from all over the country. This is a clear evidence of the able management of the present Priest, Swaminatha Sharma. Every ritual in the temple is systematized and a card system is followed for all pujas. All those who come for the puja are given *vipoothy* prasatham nicely packed as at Tellippalai, those who are unable to come from far off places receive their prasatham by post. Their names are included when the *puja* is conducted.

Devotees

The devotees who come to this temple are of multi-ethnic origin and therefore multi-religious. The devotees are not only residents of Kotahena, but also coming from distant places like Panadura, the hill country and so on. The recent migrant population from Jaffna who have settled down in Colombo form an important component of the devotees now. They have come here with the new religious practices they are accustomed to. Their attendance in large numbers may have contributed to the sudden rise in the number of devotees participating in the new rituals. It may be that this crowd promoted the present priest to introduce the new worship patterns too. The Buddhists identify Durga with *Pathini* and they come when they are affected with infectious diseases. The Hindus of course, come to ask for husbands, employment, emigration to foreign countries and for protection of their land, people and property as these are their present day problems.

3. Samy's Durga Temple with Modern Technology, Kotehena

Origin and development

Piramadevar Krishnasamy Devar, popularly known as P.K. Samy has a dual personality. He is a prosperous businessman, having establishments in Nuwara Eliya and Colombo and at the same time is a popular religious personality famed for his *manthirikam*, sorcery. His religious activities are concentrated mainly in two towns, namely Kotahena in Colombo and Nuwara Eliya and these places of worship are referred to as Sri Durga *Thevasthanam*. Anyone seeking his help, advise or consultation on any matter has to pay a large sum of money and it is rupees two hundred and fifty for a Sri Lankan, and for foreigners it is Rupees thousand. His consultation room is equipped with a computer with the necessary accessories, a Fax machine and telephone facilities. If a client so wishes, he or she can seek his advise over the phone or Fax. Horoscope reading is carried out using the computer. He has a special printed form for this, and anyone wanting his services is expected to pay a sum of rupees one thousand and five hundred and obtain this form. It carries all the questions which he would ask a client who seeks his advice. Once this form is filled and handed over, the information is fed into the computer, and the appropriate answers are obtained. Samy virtually has very little to do in this, it is his son and another assistant who attends to this.

The temple at Kotahena is in a congested part of the city, and is a part of a house where Samy lives. The shrine room is located in the second floor of the house, while the living room is downstairs so that the temple functions independently and without any interference. The shrine room is very neatly designed to give the impression of a temple. The main image in this temple is that of Durga. In addition there are the images of Kali, Mariamman, Buddha and Saint Anthony. Samy hails from the Indian Tamil community and he claims to be a descendant from the *Thevar Kulam*. During the discussion he said that he had a very difficult time as a child and could not even find the means to attend school. When he grew up, he faced the problem of having to spend for the family. In order to raise the money needed, he took to business, but lost heavily due to sheer ignorance of the trade. The few friends he had, deserted him at this crucial time and the young man having no alternative and no means of a livelihood wanted to commit suicide. However, his life changed for the better after the dream he had. In his dream, he realized the purpose of his life and that he would become a very popular saint, he said. The following morning it appears that a person by the name of Moorthy, visited him and presented him with a few books on Astrology. It is after this, he learnt

Astrology, and now, he declared 'I am an authority in this field'. He is now rich and is popular as an astrologer. The electronic facilities he has to attend to the needs of his clients is an indication of his popularity and the income he derives from his profession. He is the only person who is able to advertise himself through radio and gives solutions to the problems of the devotees.

When I inquired about his interest for Durga worship, his answer was simple and to the point. He said, 'recommendation from Siva and *Athi* Parasakthi'. When asked about Tellipplai Durga, he admitted that he had never visited this temple but he had contacts with this temple and that he had received *vipoothy prasatham* from there. He further said that Durga is the popular deity of today and therefore it is appropriate to patronize this goddess.

The Durga *Thevasthanam* at Nuwara Eliya was established in 1989 which reflects the late addition of this to the list of the Durga temples, and perhaps the spread of the Durga cult in Colombo by the Tamils who flocked to the city from Jaffna had an impact on P.K. Samy as well.

Rituals

The rituals in this temple is highly varied. Samy referred to Gayathri *Sithar* and Sivapala *Yogi* as those responsible for introducing these rituals. When asked about the significance of lime, he said lime fruit is used for charming and to get rid of ghosts from an afflicted person.

A peculiar observance at this temple is the offering *mudi mayir*, false hair for nine consecutive weeks. These are tied to a dead trunk of a tree placed at the far end of the shrine room. This, it is believed will give husbands to unmarried girls. It is interesting to note, more and more new ways are developed in trying to find relief for tensions towards finding partners.

The Puja

Puja practiced by samy is also varied from the traditional one. During the ceremony, Samy who is also the officiating Priest remains seated, and as he takes his position *rabana* (a musical rythmic instrument) is placed in front of him. Two of his assistants with *uddukku* and *mathalam* also take their places for the ceremony. A ritual fire *homa-kundam* is set up just opposite to Samy. The *puja* commences with the ringing of the bell by Samy. At the start the bell is rung slowly and softly, gradually the speed

and sound gets intensified. About this time all the other available instrument are also played.

A sacred thread is stretched from one devotee to another, this is believed to bring all of them in close communication with another and with the gods and goddesses. This recalls the event taking place in *pirith* ceremony at a Buddhist temple. At this time, one of the assistants of Samy takes a lime circled it over the head of all the devotees assembled and eventually put it into the burning fire. This is repeated many number of times. As the ritual reaches its climax, Samy begins to make loud sounds which are as follows:

Durkaiye.....Poichiya.....mania.....

Pooriya.....Poichiya.....mania.....

Pooriya.....Poori, Sunu.....yani.....

Paranikuchchina...Pangirakali....Pankarai.

As these were repeated, Samy showed signs of entering into trance and suddenly became unconscious. When he became conscious he retires to his room, where he was offered a hot drink. After which, he appeared to be normal and started giving predictions to those who approached him. It is note worthy that some of the devotees also entered into trance along with Samy.

Most of the devotees who come to this temple are those who seek salvation from *Seivinai*, affliction of ghost and the like.

4. Part time Durga temple of Iyappathasan, Thambiah Sathiram, Kotahena

In the heart of Colombo, in the crowded and business centre of Kotahena is a Pillayar Kovil. The temple is large and spacious, donated by one Thambiah *Mudaliyar* and the hall is named Thambiah *Sathiram* after the donor. The hall is hired for social and religious functions. The *Sathiram* is now a popular site for Durga worship. The Priest Iyappathasan, is the officiating priest at this temple, his talents, his religious background and his charismatic power has certainly contributed to the popularity. It is from this place of worship and particularly from Iyappathasan that I was able to obtain the necessary information on the new Durga rituals.

Iyappathasan (*Sathasiva Kurukkal*) is one of the sons of Sambasiva *Kurukal*, owner of Nayanmarkaddu Durga. As already referred, he is well versed in the agamic traditions and he is invited for important temple rituals. It is in this

environment that young Sathasivam grew up. He therefore acquired all the knowledge necessary to become a priest, and he turned out to be a very talented and versatile priest, capable of keeping the devotees in full attention, spell bound while the rituals are conducted by him. He maintains discipline but at the same time looks after the interest of the devotees, "I do not tolerate any one coming to the temple in the modern dress. I do not permit any adolescent male to come into the hall while the rituals are conducted", he said. He is strict and even when I wanted to observe the rituals, I had to get special permission from him and only with great reluctance he gave permission to take photographs, and said, "I am permitting you because it is for educational purposes".

Durga worship at Iyappathasan's House

In 1975, Iyappathasan commenced his life as a priest outside Jaffna. Initially he worked as a officiating priest at the Kurinchi Kumaran temple, University of Peradeniya, and after 5 years, in 1980 moved out to Colombo. While in Colombo, where there was no place for Durga worship, he established a Durga worshipping centre in his own house.

At the initial stage, a mother brought her eldest daughter to this centre, aged 39, yet unmarried. Her two younger sisters were already married and the mother was very worried. Having lost all hopes, she had come to Iyappathasan's centre for blessings. One day during the *puja*, the priest thinking of this worried mother and pulled out a book to sing a devotional song, a picture of Durga, one of the four pictures given to him by Kanchi Periyar, fell down from the book. He picked this up, and gave it to the mother, and requested her to propitiate this in her own shrine room. "The daughter got a husband soon after this incident", he said.

This incident made the priest to understand the problems faced by the young girls to find husbands. The youth from the Tamil areas, particularly the North had left their home town in search of employment in the West or have deserted their homes to be in the battle front. In order to help this affected group, he established a *Mathar Sangam* (Woman's Union) and *Thondar Sabai* (Youth Club). He said that in support of his idea, that night itself he had a dream and in it, a lady dressed in a red sarie and wearing a garland of lime appeared and blessed him. This to him, was no other than the goddess Durga, giving support to his ideas. The next day itself he started to function to achieve the aims as outlined above. The rituals started in his house as more or less a private place of worship, was now open to the public. He gathered information on Durga worship from an article written by one Laksmi in the magazine

titled Thirukovil. This article carried Durga *Ashdothram* (108 mantra) and a description on lime lamp lighting during *Ragukala puja*.

This place of worship became very popular, and as the devotees increased in number day by day, he has no alternative but to find another place of worship. It is to cater to the needs of this that, Thambiah *Sathiram* became a part time Durga Centre.

Rituals-*Ragu kala Puja*

About half an hour before the ritual commences a platform is arranged, and the image of Durga and Durga *Yantra* are placed. In front of this, a large tray is placed for the anointing ceremony. In addition, a *Kumbam* and a temporary *Yaga kundam* is also set up. This is used as the centre and the devotees participating in the rituals are seated in an orderly manner in two rows, in front.

In the beginning of the ceremony, the Priest Iyappathasan lit the *Homa kundam* and under his instruction the devotees take part in the *Thiruvillakku puja*. Once this is over, each devotee is given the opportunity to anoint the goddess personally.

The devotees now coming to the rituals include those with a wide variety of problems including the request for husbands, employment both local and foreign, cure illness, protection of the family and many others. It is interesting to note that even males approach the priest with their problems and that too in large numbers.

The priest Iyappathasan runs his place of worship very systematically and in a most effective manner. He refers to his place of worship as a k*uddi arasangam* (mini government). He is the sole administrator, and the members of the board take instructions from him. If a devotee wishes to become a member, he or she must be referred to by another person who is already a member in the society. Once a person becomes a member he or she is given an identify card with the registration number. There are rules and regulations which must be strictly adhered to cover all aspects ranging from dress to others. The male members are not allowed to the place of worship. The youth, under fifteen years of age are called in to maintain discipline during the rituals. The ladies participating should not be disturbed. Under emergency only a message will be conveyed by one of the youths on duty. The calm and quite atmosphere in which the puja is conducted is very much appreciated. In the normal Hindu temples, while the officiating priest conducts the rituals, one could see the devotees talking to each other, children screaming etc. But the atmosphere at Thambiah

Sathiram is like as in a Church, or in the Sai Bajans. Anyone who violates these rules are fined Rs. hundred.

Once a devotee becomes a member in the *Mathar sangam* by paying the membership fee, she is not expected to pay any money towards the expenses of the rituals when they participate. Every item necessary for the *puja* is provided by the *sangam*. They are however expected to contribute a very small amount of Rs. thirty towards the expenses of the *Adi Sevvai* festival which is celebrated on a grand scale. There are about six thousand members scattered throughout the country. All of them do not come for the weekly or monthly celebrations, but all of them are remembered during the *puja* and their names are read out, and they receive *Vipoothy prasatham* by post each month. The annual collection received for the Adi *sevvai* festival is not sufficient, he says. The expenses incurred towards this festival in 1992 was Rs. sixty five thousand, but the contribution made by the devotees is only Rs. twenty thousand, the balance is subsidised by the *sangam*.

The *Mathar sangam* is rendering a valuable service to the Hindu population in Colombo.

1. A Sunday school for the children of the Kotahena area is conducted. The classes are held in the residence of the Priest. At the end of the class, a mid-day meal is given to all the children.
2. The poor members are given financial assistance toward their matrimonial expenses, even jewellery in exceptional cases. In this regard the magnanimity shown by the priest as the officiating priest at a wedding ceremony is worth recording here.

The bride at this particular wedding is from a poor family, and with the greatest difficulty had raised the money necessary for the wedding to get her married to the boy she loved. The jewels were not made to specification as promised, it was about 11/4 sovereigns short which was discovered by the grooms party only during the ceremony. The groom disagreeing try to abandon the ceremony and return with his parents. The priest had felt very sorry for the girl, and offered his wedding ring to make up for the balance. The wedding ceremony was completed uninterrupted and the bride and her parents are to this day very grateful to the priest for his praise worthy gesture.

Iyappathasan, a devotee of Iyappa Swamy makes an annual pilgrimage to this temple in Kerala, India.

Durga worship in Jaffna has a long history, yet, it is from this temple, that I was able to gather more information relating to these new worship patterns. In fact, many

of the leading personalities associated with Hinduism like Kailasanatha Kurukkal and even Iyappathasan's Sambasiva Kurukkal said, that none of these worship patterns could be accommodated within the *Saiva Sithantha* tradition and that there is no reference to these in any of the Hindu texts, for that matter even those directly involved with these like Thangammah Appacuddy nor the devotees were able to give any satisfactory explanation.

Iyappathasan however had convincing evidences for the *Elumichchampala Villakku* ritual. The first explanation he gave is related to a Sithar from North India and the others related to the already familiar *Durga-Mahisa* myth.

1. The first myth relating to *Sithar* is very intereting. According to him, this Sithar who lived in North India in 1940s and followed very peculiar practices and rituals. He said that she has the capacity to solve many problems of the devotees, including illness, marriage, employment, childlessness, the common problems confronting man. In the beginning, he talked to his devotees, but subsequently gave up this and only offered holy *kum kum* to them. As the *Sithar* became advanced in age and mature in religious attainment, he gave up wearing clothes and spent his time meditating in a confined place. Iyappathasan in his authoritative manner and very convincingly said that the nakedness of Sithar did not affect anyone. He said, to the devotees, *Sithar* appeared as a child. He never hesitated in giving *darsan* to his devotees who came to see him and his nakedness did not anyway prevent them from coming to him. When a devotee approaches him, he closes his eyes for a moment and then offer them *kumkum* while accepting the lime they offer him. He had the habit of swallowing the lime as soon as it is offered, and may have swallowed as many as fifty to sixty fruits at any one time. This he did, within a couple of minutes. After some time, he refused to accept the lime, the devotees became worried and confused and did not know what to do with the fruits.

During this period *Sithar* appeared to one of the devotees in his dream and instructed him to cut the lime into two and after squeezing out the contents, the outer skin to be turned inside out and used as a lamp to light in front of the goddess. From then on the devotees started adopting this.

Iyappathasan said that one half of the lime fruit represents the sins committed by an individual knowingly and the other half unknowingly. By cutting the fruit, one begins to realize this and by using it as a lamp one seeks forgiveness for the sins committed by him and blessings are requested from the goddess by the devotee.

2. The myth relating to Durga Devi and the lime fruit as narrated by Iyappathasan is as follows:

   Durga Devi in the form of *Annai* Parasakthy was returning after destroying Kumpan, Sampan, Nikumpan, Mahisan and Mahisasuran. They are the demons who put the *Devas* into a very difficult position and they had to ask the gods to protect them. At this time one of her attendants approached her and said that there were many more demons in the hide and asked her how and when she was going to destroy them and protect the *Devars*. The goddess Durga became furious over this remark and commanded Naradar to collect all the remaining demons and bring them to her without any delay. Naradar was perplexed and did not know what to do. Therefore, he had to approach Lord Siva to help him. Lord Siva appeared and gave him a *thadimipalam*, which according to him, is the lime fruits, and requested that it be given to the goddess, which would cool her. Naradar was not convinced, but since the fruit was given by Siva, he did not wish to offend him and took the fruit and offered it to the goddess. He convinced the goddess that all the demons were within the fruit. Contended and happy, she swallowed it and became cooled as Siva had promised. The goddess in a happy mood asked Naradar what he would like to have as a reward. Naradar requested that the goddess bless all those who worship her and offer her *thadimipalam*. The goddess most willingly accepted the request made. It is from this myth, that the fruit gained its importance in Durga worship.

Explanation within Saiva Sithantha

Iyappathasan gave additional explanations and tried to theorize within his own imagination as well as within the frame of *Saiva Sithantha*. In any case the lime fruit formed a very important component offered by devotees in *Amman* temples. In folk temples even now lime fruits are used to make garlands and, the latter is then offered to the goddess, especially after someone has recovered from *Ammal Noii* (infectious disease). Iyappathasan further said, that we should consider the lime fruit which is in the form of the world to represent our body and then cut it into two before making it into a lamp. When one observes this, the goddess is cooled and she will take the *Santhasoruba* form to grant the devotees her grace and blessings. This puja must be carried out at *Ragukalam*, the specified time for Durga worship.

The significance of the lime light and its meaning is given below as expressed by Iyappathsan:

1. Lime is equivalent to our body.
2. Cutting the fruit is to get rid of all evil thoughts from the mind.
3. Removing the contents is like removing all evils, *moham*, *copam*, *mantham* and *acchariyam* from one's mind.
4. Oil used in lighting the lamp represents the good qualities, and the development of a keen interest by an individual.
5. The undesired qualities like *anavam*, *kanmam*, *mayai* are twisted into the wick and burnt.
6. The light thus produced represent the achievement of wisdom.

About Vishnu Durga

The explanation given by this priest to the epithet, Vishnu Durga is also interesting. A dispute developed in the world of the gods as to which god and goddess are the greatest. In this regard, Durga had claimed that she is Great for she is a combination of Lord Vishnu (her brother) and therefore she is more powerful. According to him, the name Vishnu Durga is derived from this.

He gave another explanation for the name Vishnu Durga and is as follows. It refers to the killing of the *Assuras* in *Navaratri* and on the ninth day after the last killing she immersed herself in the *paatkadal*, sea of milk in order to cleanse herself of all the sin and dirt. As she merged out of the sea of milk, she appeared as Laksmi to Vishnu, and from that particular moment she came to be known as Vishnu Durga.

5.5 Durga in the Eastern Region

A Durga Shrine at Trincomalee Kali Temple

The Kali Kovil in the town of Trincomalee is quite popular amongst the Hindus, Buddhists and the Muslims alike. *Kethara Gowri Viratham*, fasting is a popular ritual, and devotees come in large numbers from the different parts of the country to observe this fast. Those who are unable to come are not neglected, they receive the sacred thread tied during this ritual from the priest by post. This ritul is also referred to as Varalaksmi *Viratham*. About 100 years ago it appears that only about two hundred devotees observed this fast, but today the number has increased to around fifteen thousand or even more.

The temple has maintained its religious traditions from a very long time, the first *Kumbaabishekam* according to records available took place in 1933, since then,

three more *Kumbaabisheka* ceremonies have been carried out, one in 1945, another in 1962 and the third in 1980. Between the first and the last *Kumbaabishekam* several additions have been made to the temple structure. These include the *Maha mandapam*, the *kopuram* and *Vasantha mandapam*. It is not only that the temple structure was improved but additional deities were also enshrined. The goddess Laksmi and Saraswathy were enshrined in the *Nirutha Mandapam*. There is no other temple in this country, with the image of Saraswathy. Even the goddess Gowrie *Ambal* was propitiated only in 1982 and prior to this all rituals were conducted in front of Kumbam placed specially for the occasion and this represented the goddess herself.

New Durga Shrine

The eastern region is traditionally popular for its religious activities and particularly for *Amman* worship, yet for all, there is no temple for Durga and this long felt need was overcome when a new shrine room for Goddess Durga was added, to this Kali Temple in 1991. This is a donation from a Jaffna family in gratitude for the child they were blessed with. This devotee is quite a rich man with many business centers including a press. He did not have a child for a long time after marriage and in desperation made a vow and decided to build a shrine for Durga at the Kali temple. This he was able to accomplish in a short time with concurrence of the temple administration, his wife having family ties with Trincomalee made this an easy task for him. The information was gathered from the discussion I had with the temple priest and he also confirmed that after fulfilling the vow, he was blesseed with a child. Ravichandra *Kurukkal* would not divulge the name of the devotee, but he admitted that he spent an enormous sum of money towards the construction of the shrine room and also for the *Kumbaabisheka* ceremony. The priest further said that, this *Upayakaran* had visited almost all the temples including Tellippalai Durga, Vasantha Nagapooshani *Amman* temple and observed many rituals in order to be blessed with a child. But the interesting part of the episode is that they went to India for a medical check up and the lady had an operation. It is only after this they were blessed with a child. However, as far as the couple is concerned, it is the goddess who blessed them with a child.

There appears to be some confusion regarding the deity enshrined at this temple, she is said to be Vana Durga and this was confirmed by Ravichandra *Kurukkal*. However, in the notice circulated prior to *Kumbaabishekam*, the goddess is referred to as Veera Sakthi Sri Durga Parameshwary *Ambal* and in the

same notice reference is made to the goddess as the guardian of peace and harmony. (Plate 5.11)

Durga is generally looked upon as the virgin goddess but the notice while referring to the final day programme announces the marriages of Durga and that this event will be followed by *Thiruvillakku puja* at which young unmarried females and *Sumangali penkal* will participate requesting the goddess to give them husbands and a long married life.

The management priest, Ravichandra Sharma referred to the deity as Vana Durga, but Vana Durga is popular in Bengal but not in South India or Sri Lanka. This Priest further added that it became necessary to propitiate Vana Durga in the temple at a time when the country was in a crisis with ethnic problems. However, there is no information which refers to Vana Durga as a warrior goddess. The priest was also not in a position to give the significance of the name 'Durga Parameswary'. He, however, stressed that according to Tamil tradition, the goddess was always known as Vana Durga. He also added, that this is the very reason why he chose the name of Vana Durga for the goddess at this temple. At the same time he admitted that, this name had been ignored in the course of time. If the goddess is Vana Durga, then she must be enshrined facing North, but at this temple she faces East, when questioned about it the Priest reluctantly admitted, that, the Shrine room had to be constructed within the space available and thus the shrine room come to face East.

Rituals and Worship patterns

As in any other Durga temple, female devotees gather in large numbers on Tuesdays. The *Elumichcham Pala Villakku* ritual is an important event. However, unlike in other temples, the devotees are not permitted to cut the *elumichcham palam* in front of the main shrine room, for it is believed that such an act is synonymous with animal sacrifice and therefore should be avoided. The fruits are cut elsewhere and only lighted in front of the the Durga shrine. The juice collected is used for the *abishekam*.

Durga gives husbands is a popular belief in this temple too. It is reported that many young girls who observed this ritual for seven weeks, now lead a very successful married life. According to records, about hundred and fifty young girls were successful in finding husbands after observing this ritual at this temple.

The full moon day in the month of May is an important festival. The devotees observe the day, by cooking milk rice in the outer court yard, and offer the cooked

rice to the goddess in gratitude. At present those who receive husbands and those who lead a very successful married life have joined the rest of the devotees in observing this ritual. They observe this to give their thanks to the goddess who blessed them exactly as they wished.

The new rituals are made expensive and those who can afford it offer very expensive Kanchipuram saries, each worth about rupees two thousand or more as *kanikkai*. There are, according to the priest about two thousand saries or more lying in their stores. The Priest is rather reluctant to dispose these objects given as *kanikkai*. The management, has however decided otherwise, and at the time I paid a visit they were about to auction the saries and use the cash received to make jewellery for the goddess.

The temple administration is in the hands of a single family and as such it has always been easy for the management to make decisions and carry them out with the least objections from those concerned. In 1992 a hall was constructed in the southern end of the temple premises mainly to be used for the wedding ceremonies.

The management was keen to construct the Durga shrine from a very long time, but this materialized only when the childless couple came forward to build it and from then on the income increased making it possible to improve the temple structure to cater to the needs of the increasing number of devotees.

The management referred to the impact of Thangammah's religious discourses on the Hindu population of Trincomalee. The Ubayakarar of the Durga shrine was also deeply influenced by Thangammah as referred to by the Priest. He used to make annual visit with his wife to Tellippalai Durga temple, and this he did until the situation made it difficult for him to travel to the North.

Comments

This temple is the first of its kind to dedicate at least a shrine room for the Goddess Durga in the Eastern region. One could see a close similarity between this temple and the one at Tellippalai, particularly in relation to temple structure and the rituals practiced.

The temple is dedicated to Kali and is quite popular with the Hindus in the Eastern region. Many devotees from far of places including Batticaloa visit this temple annually to observe *Gowri Kappu Viratham*. However, the temple income remained low and it is only after the setting up of the Durga shrine that the financial position improved.

This is evident from the improvements made to the existing temple structure and the construction of a '*kalyana mandapam*', wedding hall in the recent times. In this regard a parallel can be drawn between the Tellippalai Durga temple and this temple in particular.

The form of the image of Durga is unique and is unlike the traditional ones. Here the goddess has eight arms instead of the six, the latter is the more common. It may be because of this she is referred to as Vana Durga, in addition, to many devotees she is simply Durga Parameshwari. It is strange, for the goddess faces East and not North, a position which is difficult to expain or justify. The temple administration however, was not at all concerned about all this, to them the popularity of the goddess and thereby increased income is all that they are concerned about. In fact the priest admitted that with the limited space they were left with no other alternative but to accommodate the shrine room within the available space.

The goddess here is also said to give husbands and the devotees who observe all the new rituals like *Elumichcham Pala Villakku* and *Thiruvillakku pujas*.

The Eastern region is traditionally popular for its religious activities and particularly for *Amman* worship. Apart from this, there is no temple for the Goddess Durga in Tricomalee. The Durga devotees are overjoyed when this new shrine room for the goddess was added to this temple, a long felt need for almost every devotee who visit this temple. There seems to be a trend for Durga shrines in Batticaloa itself, in the existing Kannakai *Amman* temples in the near future.

5.6 Revival of Few Temples in South India

1. Paddiswaram Durga Temple

The temple located about eight miles from Kumbakonam is yet another popular temple of Goddess Durga. Women's magazines have contributed in many ways to the rise of this temple as well as many other Durga temples (Mangayar malar, 1993). The devotional songs, particularly those sung by cinema artists have also contributed towards this popularity. Another way in which gods and goddesses are made popular is by the myths spread by devotees. In this case, a devotee is said to have met with a serious accident, but had a miraculous recovery. This is attributed to the blessings bestowed on him and his family by the goddess. From then on he and his family devoted their time for the development of the temple. This story had spread far wide and many Hindus started patronizing this temple.

It is believed that the original site of this temple is different from the present one. During the time of the Chola period it appears that the goddess had a small shrine room in a part of the palace. It was customary for the kings to ask for the blessings before venturing on any new activity and when it comes to war, no Chola king would dare to enter the battle field before getting her blessings. However, when the Chola dynasty collapsed, the images of the goddesses were taken to Padiswaram and enshrined there.

The deity in the Sanctum Sanctorum is in the standing position and in the *bogha* form without any trace of the traditional *ghora* aspects. Another peculiar feature is that the goddess has eight arms instead of the traditional four arms. The goddess is mounted on the head of the slained demon, *Mahisa*. It is also unique in that she carries a parrot in one of her hands, and the latter is a symbol of calmness and happiness.

Apart from the devotee referred to above, a number of others also have contribued in a like manner to the development of this temple.

2. Seevaliperi Vishnu Durga, India

This is a very popular temple in India and is situated along the Pooranei river, in the Thirunelvelly district in South India. The temple was originally known as Sri Vallava Peri temple, after a very popular Pandyan King. It was originally a small temple constructed by contributions made by a number of Hindu devotees, and particularly among them is Shankar, an orphan. During his childhood, he had visited this temple and was very much impressed by the graceful appearance of the goddess. When he grew up, the sheer poverty that prevailed in his home forced him to leave for the city in search of a job. Shankar before leaving his village, paid a visit to the temple and asked her blessings and begged of her to be with him during his journey and to bless him with a happy and prosperous future. Indeed the goddess did bless him and in Bangalore he did rise to a very high position in life and having earned sufficient money, returned to his native village quite a rich man. It is after his return, that he with the help of the other devotees constructed a new temple for the goddess Durga.

According to information from a women's magazine published in September of 1993, the famous karnatic musician and cinema singer Balamurali Krishna, came forward to raise the money necessary for the temple. He released a special tape titled '*Varam Arulum Durga*', meaning the goddess who reward

the devotees. The sale of this cassette brought enough money necessary for the construction work.

The image in the Sanctum Sanctorum is that of Vishnu and Durga in the *Shantha Sorubi* form and this combination is rather unusual and found nowhere else. It is believed that this temple will in the near future become one of the most popular ones dedicated to Goddess Durga.

Durga in The Western Countries

The Tamils who have emigrated in the recent years to the different parts of the world have carried with them their culture and traditions. In their new homeland they established temples to fulfill their religious needs and here too, Durga became the more popular goddess. Temples have been set up in Canada, France, Denmark, Switzerland and Germany.

The godess in these temples are that of Vishnu Durga who is believed to protect them, bless them with jobs, husbands, and a happy married life.

The foreign magazines and Newspapers in Tamil carrying news items and articles relating to Durga worship is a noticeable feature now.

Reference

1. *Annual Report* 1977, Temple publication, Tellippalai Durga Devastanam, Tellippalai.
2. *By law of Sai Durga Temple* 1986, Temple publication, Tellippalai Durga Devastanam. Tellippalai.
3. Gombrich, Richard & Gananathe Obeyesekere 1990, *Buddhism Transformed*, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, Delhi.
4. Kandiah, M 1990, *Sri Durga Devi Temple*, Studies on Sri Lanka series- no. 1, Sri Satguru Pulications, Indian book centre, Delhi.
5. *Kumbaabisheka malar* 1981, Temple Publication, Tellippalai Durga Devastanam, Tellippalai.
6. *Mangayar Malar* 1993, Women magazine published by K Rajendran on behalf of Bharathan Publications Pvt. Ltd, Ed. Manjula Ramesh, Jawaharlal Nehru Road, Madras.
7. Obeyesekera, Gananath 1977, 'Psycho-cultural Exegesis of a case of spirit Possession from Sri Lanka' *Contributions to Asian Studies* 8:42-89.
8. Raghavan, M.D n.d, Tamil culture in Ceylon, Colombo: Kala Nilayam.
9. Rasanayagam, C 1926, *Ancient Jaffna*, Every Man's Publishers, Madras.
10. Shanmugalingam, N 1988, *Agrarian Change and Social Structure : case study of Jaffna village*, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation University of Jaffna, Jaffna.
11. Shanmugasundaram, T 1979, Navalar's Religious Mission, *Arumuga Navalar Centenary volume*, ed. K. Kailasapathy, Thirumakal Press Chunnakam, Jaffna.
12. Vithiyananthan, S 1981, In *Virakesari Tamil Daily*, Associated news papers Ltd, Colombo (1.09.1981).

6

Modern Literature on Durga and Myth Makers

The new rituals associated with Durga worship are not traditional to Hindu religion and a majority of those who practice them had no idea of their significance. However, during my field study, I managed to collect information on matters relating to it. There are four different personalities who are responsible for these publications and I shall in this chapter refer to those of relevance to the present study.

The most important of these publications is the one written by Durgai Sithar of Madras, in 1982. The publications by Amman Arul Sathyanathan and Poiyamoliyar also from South India are equally important. Finally the publications by Iyappathasan, already referred to are quite different from the above but very informative.

The publications are all written in simple language, quite handy being small in size and quite cheap and within the reach of all. The devotees therefore had the opportunity to purchase these, without much difficulty. In addition to these, extracts from the above are periodically published in the popular women's magazines, also released from South India. It is important to stress that, most of the information given do not tally with the traditional Hindu texts, and therefore one would tend to doubt the validity. However, the devotees are most unconcerned about these problems and they continue to practice the rituals with the same dedication and interest they had at the beginning, in other words, the conflicting ideas do not seem to bother them at all.

These ideas are expressed most explicity in the forward written by Durgai Sithar, and one of these is as follows,

> "Many of the leading Hindu personalities do not agree with me, and many condemned the explanations given and even challenged the need for such publications. However, there were hundreds of devotees who welcomed this and praised me for the interest I had taken to publish the information available on Durga worship in the form of a book. This, I believe, will give a clear understanding of Durga worship and her devotees will benefit".

Publications by Durgai Sithar

Santhosa Archchana Malai

This *Soupakia Ashdothram* compiled by Durgai Sithar explain the significance of Durga worship. According to him, those who observe this will no doubt receive *Mangalam* (blessings) from the goddess. This *mantra* should be recited only on special days of the week, Tuesdays, Fridays, Asdami, Pooranai and not on other days.

A person who follows this, will be blessed with a suitable partner in life, and such persons when married, have a happy wedded life.

The type of flowers to be offered by the devotees is also specified, a particular colour or kind of the flower is suggested for each occasion. Red and yellow flowers are considered to be symbols of *Mangalam* and these are to be offered by a devotee who wishes to be freed of his or her poverty, sorrows and the like such a person will be able to achieve this without delays. On the other hand, a person wishing to become wealthy must offer red lotus. Again *Kasturi* (saffron) and jasmine are to be offered for a happy married life.

The offering of kumkum is recommended to overcome difficulties of any form.

It is also interesting to note, that the book also make reference to instances where a person may not be able to observe in the manner described above. Such persons accordingly, are not completely lost, for they can achieve the same, simply by repeatedly observing the rituals in his or her own shrine room.

Mangalya Mantra

"Karna Suthroppa Sintharka Kamneeja Muhampuja
Karajasjayanthis Vathana Kandamoola Sunkuma".

The married women are expected to recite the above at least hundred and eight times a day and upto a maximum of four thousand times. Each woman is expected to make kumkum by mixing *Kasturi*, camphor and scent into a paste. This should then be offered to the goddess as the mantra is recited. The kumkum thus offered must be carefully collected and kept in the shrine room to be applied daily on her forehead, as a symbol of *Mangalyam*.

The husband too can join the wife during the ritual, but is not compelled to do so.

Mantra for Marriage

"Pathy Vivaaka Kalasri Poornakumba Sathanathvaya
Anaka Javanaprana Mantra Kumba Sathanath Vaya".

The above *mantra* is to be recited by young girls at *Udayakalam*, morning and *Sandayakalam*, evenings. It is preferred that this recital takeplace in a Siva Parvathy temple or in a Durga temple. The number of times to be recited is determined by multiplying the age of the person concerned by four. There are concessions to this also, in that, after a definite period of time, the number of times to be recited may be reduced to one third of the original.

A person following this ritual must place a piece of *Kasturi* at the foot of the goddess in the shrine room. As the *mantra* is recited it is believed that the goddess will enter the piece of Kasturi and reside within. The same Kasturi should be used throughout the specified period as this is believed to strengthen the Kasturi and one is expected to worship in this manner six times a day for thirty three days. Each devotee is expected to keep this in her own shrine room. The devotee on her birthday, should (*concentrate*) on this Kasturi and observe silence, at the same time thinking of the goddess, as this is expected to bless the person concerned with an early marriage.

Married ladies can also observe this ritual as it is believed, will have *Mangalyapalam*. The married women are always expected to apply Kasturi to her forehead and to the *Thali*, which are all symbols of Mangalyam, a state of fullness. To a lady nothing is more important than the life of her husband. A large proportion of the women give importance to this aspect in their life.

It is important to note here, that the women are expected to devote full attention to household duties and any woman neglecting this will earn the wrath of the goddess.

***Thampathy Sallapam* (Sex play of the couple)**

"Avayaya, Karunakuptha Daru Raviayasundari,
Srikara, Rasambriya Pathapishesitha".

In most families, there is an understanding between the husband and wife and *sallapam* should be practiced without considering any gain or profit. It may be that on certain days a woman may not like to have sallapam and if forced she will behave like a snake that had fallen into the fire. Any male who attempts to have

sex with a woman in this frame of mind will himself feel uncomfortable. This is because a bad odour is released from the body of such a lady and is said to be due to the depressed state of her mind. It is to be noted that any one resorting to unwanted sex may lead to problems in the family life.

The *mantra* from the Gupta *Yohinikal* provides the necessary remedy for such disturbances in the sex life of an individual. It is believed that these *Yohinikal* resides in the *Sri Cacara* and it is from these that one receives the blessings.

It is not common, but the male can also behave in the above manner just like a woman. As remedial measures one should use *Vipoothy* as the *mantra* is recited.

The *mantra* is recited, as in the previous cases, and this figure is obtained by calculating the added age of the husband and wife and taking one third of this and multiplied by thousand.

If a couple attempts to have sex after observing the procedure in detail, neither of the partners will ever feel unnatural.

"Oh reem sura, sunthariyal kleeninama

Asyree for prayers"

A number of *mantras* like the above are quoted in the text by sithar. Some of these could be used to overcome one's enemies, or even to destroy them.

There are also other mantra referred to in the text which can be recited to overcome bad planetary periods.

Some *mantras* from this text are used to get rid of *Pei, Pissasu* or even to cut *Seivinai*.

For Illnesses

"Swalamaga, swalanetra, swalanga, swarnasiri
Salyahari, salyahantri, salyamantri sals sala"

The above is *mantra* to be recited when a person falls sick particularly those illnesses connected with rise in temperature. Before the *mantra* is recited, an auspicious day must be selected. The shrine room, or a selected part of a room in the absence of a shrine must be specially prepared for this by placing a '*Nirai kudam*', a pot filled with water and medicinal herbs, a coconut and mango leaves spreadout around its mouth. This *Nirai kudam* is placed on a plantain leaf placed in the centre of a table or on the ground. Margosa leaves are placed around the *Nirai kudam*. This whole set up is said to represent the goddess and an object to be worshipped.

The *mantra* must be recited in front of this for three days, three hundred and thirty times each day. At the end of the third day, the sacred water within the pot is used for *abishekam*, and a portion of it is sprinkled on the head of *Upasakar* using a mango leaf. The whole process must be repeated twice more to make a total of nine days. At the end of this ritual, the Upasakar is in a position to treat the patient, for he is now blessed by the goddess to do so. While the patient is being treated, he should offer the medicine to the patient along with *Vipoothy* and reciting the same *mantra*.

If a person suffers from a stomach ailment due to *Seivinai*, the following *mantra* should be recited,

"Shastra salmaya thasa kariyana nage samasthiuge
kushda kula Brahmegalnee kooda salyavilasini"

A person resorts to *Seivinai* when he becomes jealous over one's wealth, educational achievements, job positions etc. The help of a sorcerer is obtained for this. Even the cutting of *Seivinai* can be carried out only with the help of the sorcerer. However, in the book by Durgai Sithar, the juice of the pumpkin fruit is said to have a neutralizing effect on the '*Marunthu*', consumed by a person without his knowledge. *Marunthu* is a kind of liquid which is supposed to have all the bad spells, 'put' into by the sorcerer.

It also refers to the recital of specific *mantra* which is said to have a nullifying effect on the *marunthu* consumed by a victim. Before the recital, it goes on to say that a tray with special kinds of leaves must be placed in front of the person reciting the *mantra*. At the end of it, the leaves are to be cooked and given to the victim as a curry. It is said that the *Marunthu* from the victim will during defecation pass away.

Literature of Amman Arul Sathiyanathan & Swami Poiyamoliyar

I will now refer to the literature published in 1992 by Amman Arul Sathiyanathan and Swami Poiyamoliyar. The text is more or less similar to that published by Durgai Sithar. The following is a translation from the publication titled 'Durga Puja Valipadu'.

Durga Worship

Durga, the mother goddess is the great goddess who met the demons in the battlefield and subdued their pride and thus captured the hearts of both the *Thevar* and the devotees alike.

How do we worship this mighty goddess?
How do we obtain her grace?
How do we obtain her blessings?

Importance of *Ragu Kalam*

Goddess Durga is the goddess for *Ragukalam*. Durga is one of the many forms of Parasakti, and almost all are aware of it. *Ragukalam* is the best time to approach this goddess and we could pray to her when we are in distress or when need arises. A person observing *Ragukala puja* will certainly be blessed.

Importance of Tuesdays

Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays are the most suitable days to observe this puja, but Tuesday is the most suitable of the three and the time for this is between 3 and 4.30 p.m. The devotees should go to the temple, pure of mind and body, and should fast on this day. Before going to the temple, one must wear clean clothes apply holy ash, kumkum and flowers. The devotees should also carry with them a tray with offerings to the goddess. The offerings should include beetle leaves, coconut, fruits, kasturi, holy ash, kumkum, camphor and flowers. On entering the temple, the tray should be handed over to the priest, who will in turn offer it to the goddess.

Ragukala puja observed in this manner, is the best of all the *pujas* to get rid of all affliction and to receive the blessings of the goddess.

The flower most suited for the puja is red *Arali* (nerium) flowers. These flowers are generally available in plenty throughout the year and one will not experience any difficulty in obtaining them. The flowers should be made into a garland and offered.

Importance of *Elumichampala Villakku*

The devotees should also carry the lime fruit which is to be used as the lamp. It is important that no one lights a single lamp, particularly young girls waiting for marriage. The number of lamps burnt can vary depending on the need and the capacity of the person concerned. As the lamp is lit and the flame gets intense, the devotee must concentrate on the flame, for its in the flame that one is expected to see the goddess. The devotee should recite the *mantra* as the lamp burns and request the goddess to accept the *puja* and bless them. A devotee should never be reluctant, for after all the request made is to the goddess who is the mother of all, she is the only one who can fulfil our needs. It is only by asking that one will become close to the goddess, therefore, one should never hestitate to ask her to fulfil their needs. Durga is like a mother loving and giving, she will bless all and give

her grace. During the *puja* it is important that all the devotees in one voice chant loudly the hundred and eight mantra and once this is over, sing the devotional songs given below;

Prayer to the Goddess

Page : 22-23

1. Goddess for mangalam, please give me mangalam
   On your pure and serene face I concentrate
   I lit the oil lamp of fragrance and worship you
   Grant me the life that I desire very much
   I have no other comfort, mother of Vel Murugan.

2. I observed Puja in Ragukalam
   You are the goddess of Ragukalam
   Elumichcham pala villakku is for you
   Please enter into the light of the lamp
   This is the Puja this Kanni, (young girl) performs
   Grant me my wedding day my mother.
   I offered kumkum as I recited the mantra
   Protect our Kulam, my mother
   I garlanded you with lime fruits
   Please give me my wedding garland my mother.

Page: 24

I saw your face in the light of the lamp
You know the cause for all bad actions
I am alone here with no support
Please grant me my husband, my mother.

Page: 25

Sri Durga Charanam (only important lines relevant to the study is given below)

Goddess of war charanam, charanam
One who grants married life charanam, charanam
The one who guards kumkum on my forehead charanam
The one who conquers all enemies around charanam

Page: 51

Praises to Ragukala Durga

Supporter of Mangalyam, the one goddess
Who could be worshipped on the Mangala day

One who gives Mangalyam, I worship your feet

Page: 51

Pala Sthuthy

If you worship Mangala, Chandika on Mangala days
She will bless you and grant you all that you ask
for.....

If one chants the Mangala praises about the Devi, there is nothing that one cannot achieve in this world. By this means, one is able to obtain all worldly desires like wealth, health, education, jobs, partner etc.

Time suitable for Durga worship

Upasana Kulapathy Shri Durgai Sithar is a very versatile person with a sound knowledge of the subject and in addition has magical powers and hence very popular during his time. According to him, there is no Sivan temple without a shrine for Durga. In a Sivan temple, the Durga shrine is to be placed on the outer left hand side of the Sanctum Sanctorum according the agamic traditions and rules.

Ragukalam (*Yama Kandam*) is not suitable for anything, and any activity undertaken at this time results in a failure, and this is a common belief. The Hindus are always careful that they do not undertake any activity of importance at this time. Therefore, it is really surprising and difficult to accept this time as the most suitable for Durga *puja*. But this Sithar says, that it is the most suitable time and the people here have now come to accept it.

The Universal Sakti (energy) is represented in the form of Durga. Ragu and Kethu which are two of the nine planets full of energy. It is believed that on the day of the eclipse, the sun and the moon are both affected by Ragu and Kethu. One must note that the planet for the particular day is of a week afflicted by Ragu and Kethu. It is referred to as *Ragukalam*. It is believed that Ragu worshipped Mahasakti and was rewarded with his high energy and the puranas refer to this myth.

Durga is worshipped at *Ragukalam* with the hope that they will be blessed like Ragu. *Ragukalam* actually refers to the time of the day when the planet for the day is affected by Ragu and Kethu. The worship of Mahasakti at this time is recommended to reduce the impact of this.

A puja conducted at this time is more rewarding than *puja* conducted at any other time of the day. The *Ragukalam* on a Tuesday is recommended because it is on this

day, Iynkaran worshipped Durga, as Mangala Chandikai and was rewarded as revealed by Sithar.

Tuesday as *Mangala Varam*

Tuesday are also known as *Mangala Varam*, on this day, yellow and white flowers must be offered, for these colours are symbols for Mangalam and purity. Even the fruits offered should be like bananas, jack, mangoes which are all yellow in colour. All these should be offered with yellow coloured milk rice or lime rice. During the actual puja, Shri *Durga Chandika Sthuthi*, devotional songs must be chanted or sung. In Tamil we have, '*Ragukala Durga Ashdakam*', '*Durga Nivarana* (remedy) *Ashdakam*', '*Durga Ashdakam*', '*Roga Nivarana Ashdakam*' and all these could be used during the *puja* for chanting or singing. Durga can be imprisoned in the burning light in the yantra or even in the heart of a devotee and prayed to.

Remedy for mars Affliction

It is to be noted that the mighty Durga is worshipped not only in this world, but in all the three worlds. It is believed that Ragu worshipped Durga on the *Mangala* day and is, therefore, always happy with a smiling face, in addition his mind is also fresh and active. It is probably this that made Durga worship so important, particularly on a *Ragukala Tuesday*. It is also a day on which, those afflicted with Mars, and facing marriage problems, and those afflicted with incurable diseases, observe fasting to evoke the blessing of the goddess.

It is ideal to go to a Durga temple at *Ragukalam* and worship the goddess, but if this is not possible, then one could worship at home. During this, a golden colour lime should be cut into two and used as lamps. At *Ragukalam* in the temple of Durga, *Subashini* or *Sumangali* ladies, should be worshipped, a devotee observing this will be blessed by the goddess. A young person doing this could offer the *Sumangali* a tray with auspicious items. A person receiving the blessings of a *Sumangali* is said to achieve the status of *Sumangali* herself within a reasonable time.

Similar type of explanation and remedies

The following is taken from the publication by Durgai Sithar and one can notice the similar type of explanations and remedies these modern literatures give.

Ragu Kala Puja for Mangalyam

Ragu kala puja gives a woman the *Mangalam*. The life as husband and wife is the best part of one's life. In order to achieve the married status and then to retain it one must pray to the goddess. Some men and women have delayed married life and this is due to the bad positioning of the different planets at birth or may be delayed due to other afflictions. Many different methods are available to overcome this.

On Fridays at *Ragukalam*, *Amirtha Kadigai* time such afflicted persons must pray to Durga Devi and request her for grace and blessings. During this time, it is necessary for the devotee to chant the following *mantra* almost hundred and eight times:

"Sarva mangala mangalye Sive Sarvartha Sathake
Sarange Thriambage, Devi Narayani Namosthuthe"

In addition, one should according to her age, chant the following *mantra* many times as her age and if married, the husband's age is to be added to the wife's age and the mantra recited accordingly.

"Durgam Devam Charana Mangampirapathye
Schuthara Sitharase nama"

The devotees at the end of the puja must offer a *Sumangali* a tray of beetle leaves, arecanut, flowers, Kasturi, fruits and kumkum. Those who can afford it may include in the tray *thadchchanai*, cash. Such offerings must be made at *Ragukalam*, on a Friday at the time Sukkiran (10.30 - 12.00 noon) and Ragu meet. This is the time referred to as *Amirtha Kadigai*, time of *amutham* (sweetness).

At this time of *amutham*, the husband and wife together could pray for their unity. During this puja flowers like *Manoranjitham* and Jasmine must be offered to the goddess Durga. The devotees must apply *Kasturi thilagam* to the forehead of the goddess.

It is also advisable to offer beetle leaves to an old *Sumangali* couple and receive their blessings as well. If the devotee desires and if they can afford, they could offer, sarie, blouse, veshdi and a shawl to the *Sumangali* couple. But at the same time one should avoid unnecessary expenses, without being stingy either. When god blesses you, with wealth, then you should be prepared to give, out of what you receive, to others.

The *puja* must be observed for sixteen weeks, and if the person observing this has any form of affliction, it is important that it be observed for fourty five weeks.

The costly and expensive items may be offered on the day of the last puja, but the inexpensive items should be offered every week.

Publications to Shri Iyappathasan

A book of this nature has never been published earlier in Sri Lanka

Preface of the Book

Our ancestors worshipped the mother goddess of the whole universe, namely Annai Parasakthi. She is however, worshipped in different forms and by different names. By doing so they were blessed and at the end became one with god. It has become a general practice for an individual to approach the gods and goddesses only when we are confronted with problems. But, one should develop the habit of daily worship and devotion in order to obtain the grace.

Our ancestors have left behind us the rules that are necessary to be practiced. They left these for us so that we can benefit. The book refers to *puja* that must be practiced when one is in trouble, pain or is sick, so that the goddess will come close to them and give them the courage to overcome such difficulties.

Ragukala Durga puja is an important one in this regard. By practicing this, the devotee will be blessed and as a result, will be able to lead a happy and contended life.

This puja is practiced on *Pournamie* days, Tuesday and Fridays at *Ragukalam*. The persons afflicted by Ragu, Kethu, Sarpa and Sevvai are advised to observe this to overcome such afflictions. The position of Ragu and Kethu at the time of birth affects one's life and results in delayed marriage. All such afflictions will vanish, when such persons worship the goddess at *Ragukalam*, for she is the goddess of Ragu and Kethu.

Ragukalam: Ragukalam falls at different times on each day of the week, and on Tuesdays it is between 3.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. and on Fridays it is between 10.30 a.m. and 12.00 noon.

Durga is the goddess associated with Ragukalam and therefore, she is worshipped by those with such afflictions, so that they be reduced of such afflictions by her grace. A person observing this must fast and only then perform the puja by either lighting the *Elumichcham Pala Villakku* or the traditional *Kuthuvillakku* in front of the goddess. While doing so she should burn camphor, jossticks, chant *mantra* and sing

devotional songs. Kumkum and flowers must also be offered while each mantra is chanted. The mantra chanted varies from hundred and eight *mantras* (Ashdothra), three hundred *mantras* (Thirisathyanama) to thousand *mantras* (Sakasranama).

In order to satisfy the long felt needs of the devotess, the Illangai Sabarimalai Sasthana Peedam takes pleasure in releasing this booklet under the auspicious of the women's front. The puja is conducted in order to receive the blessings of the Goddess Durga, who in the form of Annai Parasakthi will bless them and redeem them from such afflictions and bless them with everlasting happiness, he concluded.

Devotional Songs

Composed by Shri Sasta Peedam Shri Iyappathasan

We have lit the *Elumichchampala Villakku*
rid us of all our problems
Will worship once a week-Light
the lamp of our lives.
We lit the *kuthuvillakku*-We
see you in the *Kumbam*
Performed *Archanai* with kum kum
protect our family ammah.
Worshipped you with praises
come with grace ammah
To *Sastha Peedam* at *Ragukalam*
we are certain you will come.
Mangala Rubini Durgai Ammah-Praise to
you on this auspicious day
Mangala Puja is conducted by *Mathar*
accept this with *mangalam*.
Durga Ammah who rid us of our problems
we praise you with pure hands
Give us happiness and protect us
will worship you always.

Ragukala Durga Ashdakam

You are life Durga and the world too
you are in the heavens but come here too
You never faced defeat, you are mother too
rid me of my anxiety and support me.
Devi Durga, Jeyadevi Durga
Devi Durga. Jeyadevi Durga
You gave birth to the world and You are Uma and
You are truthful, protector of life Durga.
You are in the moon, ever permanent Durga
You were in the moon, my wealth Durga
Devi Durga, Jeyadevi Durga
Devi Durga, Jeyadevi Durga
You are perfect Durga, prayers you are
mother you are, loving father you are
You are at present Durga of happiness
goddess of all times, perfect Durga.
Devi Durga, Jeyadevi Durga
Devi Durga, Jeyadevi Durga
You are my life Durga, my body too
You are the world, my property you are
You are the plants Durga, the support for them
goodness to blossom, you fill my heart Durga.
Devi Durga, Jeyadevi Durga
Devi Durga, Jeyadevi Durga
You are without sorrow Durga, your life is full and complete
You are our goal, the will that takes us there
You are the fountain of love, house of refuge
you support me, you are in me Durga.

Comments

The original of these devotional songs are available in an earlier publication by Durgai Sithar (1982), but in Iyappathasan's booklet, there is no reference to this. It may be that he had tried to claim the credit to himself. Particularly in relation to the explanation regarding the origin of the *Elumichchampala Villakku* worship, and the explanations associated with it. But the booklet by Durgai Sithar appears to be the original and the first to have been published.

References

1. Durgai Sithar 1982, *Palan Tharum Ragukalapujai*, (In Tamil) Pilot Publications, Chennai (Madras), *Palan tharum Sri Durga Sahastanamam*, Pilot Publications, Chennai (Madras).
2. Iyappathasan n. d, *Ragukala puja*- Collected work, (in Tamil) Matharani, All ceylon sabarimalai Sri Sasta Peedam, Colombo 13.
3. Polyamoliyar 1992, *Sri Durga pujai Valipadu*, (in Tamil) Chennai. (Madras).
4. Sathiyanathan, Amman 1992, *Sri Durga devi Sthothira malai (in Tamil)*, Amman pathippakam, Chennai (Madras).

7

Conclusion

The present study clearly illustrates, the symbolic dimension of religious changes by examining how the new face of Durga reflects the manner in which the major social, psychological and symbolic changes occuring in the present day Jaffna society merged with one another. Here, a traditional symbol was revitalized to cater the changing needs of the society. Durga cult has swept Jaffna with a popularity that has grown geometrically in the last two decades. There are several factors involved in the emergence and persistence of this new face and as Glyn Richards (1991:1) in his study on symbols and religious language indicates

> "the choice and development of a symbol is the result of the acceptability of that symbol and of decisions taken within particular social, religious or cultural context, and the relevance of a symbol, or its value, importance and meaning, is to be found within these contexts and is related to the thing symbolized".

The present study examined, the expression of this divine symbol and the social-cultural changes of Jaffna in the context of its contemporary currents. The interrelationship of these two factors are considered and these are discussed under the following headings by looking at Tellippalai Durga as the major symbol and exploring its manifestations in the different domains.

A. Religious Changes

1. Change at Tellippalai Durga Temple.

1.1 The sudden rise of Durga.

In an orthodox saivite tradition with dominance of male deities, suddenly a female goddess, namely Durga gained popularity at Tellippalai, Jaffna.

We have seen, that a number of female devotees, both married and unmarried visiting this temple dramatically increased from 1977 with a corresponding increase in the temple income. Table 5.4 indicates this. A marked increase in the collection of *untial* is seen from 1977 onwards. It almost doubled in 1978, and increased sixfold in 1980, and thereafter there has been a steady increase annually.

This increase in the income, is reflected in the physical development of the temple. The tiny temple of Durga suddenly developed into a most popular temple with addition of shrine rooms, courtyards, *kopuram* and so on as seen in Chapter 5.

1.2 The New Face

Durga, in the *ghora* form is said to have changed into the *bogha* form and the role of the goddess has become significant in the life of Jaffna people now. This change, according to Thangammah and others, is due to two major factors as referred to earlier, namely the goddess carrying *chanku* and *cacara* which are symbols of Vishnu, and since Vishnu is benevolent, Durga is also in the same form. And the fact that the Sanctum Santorum faces east in contrast to the traditional north position of Durga, is the other factor, they give.

Infact, the image in the Sanctum Sanctorum carries the skull and the trident. And in addition, she stands on the slain body of the demon. One can therefore see the contradictions in the explanations given.

However, as far as the devotees are concerned, they flock to this temple inorder to avail themselves of the blessings given by Durga in her new role as follows:

1. Durga is said to give husbands to her young female devotees. This is the current and popular belief associated with her new face.
2. Durga safeguards the *Sumangali* state, in other words, the married status of the thousands of female devotees who come to her.
3. Goddess Durga is also looked upon as the mother who gives foreign employment to her male devotees.

1.3 New Rituals

Rituals relating to planetary afflictions and marriage, it has been shown that these are unrelated, rather unusual to the Saiva traditions of the Jaffna society. These are new innovations bewailed from other cultural sources like the Vaishnavite cult and Tantric cult,' etc.

As Pathmanathan (1979:150) states, this new religious inspirations may have reached here through South Indian architects and other artisans who were invited for the construction of the temple and casting of the images. In addition, the religious dignitary namely Haridas who associated himself with this temple also had an important role in these changes. But infact, I found that the real source of these new innovations can be traced to the publicity given by Durgai Sithar and his disciples, and the media

influence on them specially, the women magazines.

1.4 A Lady President

This is the first time in the history of Jaffna a lady was elected to the post of President of the Board Trustee of Tellippalai Durga temple which was until then held by males. It is during her period, that changes in the ritual practices were introduced.

1.5 Social Work

Reflecting social environment by doing social work for the first time in Jaffna Temple traditions.

2. Spread of Durga Cult

Popularity of Durga worship gained grounds at Tellippalai but has now spread not only to Jaffna but also throughout the country. This is seen from the increase in the worshipping centres of Durga.

The emergence of these places of worship can be identified as follows;

2.1 The changing of already existing mother goddesses as Durga, for eg. Kali temple as Sai Durga temple. (Sai Durga at Kokkuvil)

2.2 Renovating the already existing Durga shrines of other temples by giving new name boards, and introducing new rituals for eg, Naguleswaram at Keerimalai.

2.3 Establishing new Durga temples, particularly those associated with healing mothers eg; Mirusuvil Durga temple by Manonmani and Alwai Durga by jayaranic.

B. Social Changes

Sociological factors behind this religio-symbolic changes can be identified by analysing the socio-cultural changes of Jaffna as explained in Chapter 3.

Socio-Cultural Factors

Acute social problems faced by Jaffna from the 1970s, specially a society which is built around the family as basic institution:

1. Anxiety over the short supply of bridegrooms.

Short supply of the bridegrooms, as already referred to in Chapter 3, is due to the acute unemployment developed in the country during 1970s; the educational barriers faced by

the Tamil students; mass exodus of youth due to the ethnic violence; rebellious youth abandoning families.

In addition to these, the attitude of Jaffna society towards finding suitable bridegrooms still remain the same.

Demand for increased dowry is due to the scarcity of bridegrooms; readiness by some to give a big dowry due to increased flow of foreign money. In short, marriages became diffiicult due to two closely interwoven factors, one is the lack of prospective bridegrooms and the other is the demand for more dowry.

II. Anxiety Over Sumangali Status.

The war in the country took the lives of many married men and increased the anxiety of the existing ones, and the fear for foreign employed husbands and their safe return. It is only the males who left the country, while their families continued to remain, the women became over anxious about their husbands, and since widowhood is abhorred.

The women having no alternative resorted to divine help. A widow or even a divorced female is not given a dignified place in the rigid society of Jaffna. The word for widowhood in Tamil is *aruthali* with a feminine ending and it refers to the cutting off the *thali* thread from around the neck of a woman.

This anxiety for *sumangali* status is further magnified by some of the newly created awareness for this status through the new rituals referred to. The observation made by Clifford Geertz ((1973:164) that religion here is somehow the centre and source of stress and not merely the reflection of stress as elsewhere in the society.

III. Anxiety Over Foreign Employment

Unemployment in the country and the want of dowry for the daughters or sisters pressurised more males to seek foreign employment.

In the recent past along with the educated youth, the semi-educated youth too compete for foreign employment. In view of this, they give large amount of money to agents and only a few succeed and the rest remain in anxiety.

The structure of the devotees coming to the temple illustrates quite distinctly the facts referred to above. In the absence of recognized social institutions, the temple with its new rituals developed a culturally acceptable institution to fulfil their social and psychological needs.

The Mediator

The takeover of the presidency by a lady with charismatic powers and a person who was in a position to identify the cause of these problems as already referred. Here, Thangammah Appacuddy as a religious leader, influenced very much the religious changes that took place. In this regard, one could visualise Thangammah as a symbolic manifestation of social forces, but at the same time, as President of this temple, she had the opportunity to avail the devotees with new rituals and thereby she becomes the prime mediator of these historic religious changes.

There are many typologies of religious leaders, most of which are descriptive. Joachim Wach refers to nine different types of religious authority and Thangammah actually fits into the category of a plain man (woman), who leads a religious life. Her authoritative position in this temple at Tellippalai as well as her knowledge on social and cultural environment, made her a successful religious leader.

As referred by Robert J House ((1976), Thangammah with her extremely high level of self confidence, dominance and a strong conviction in the moral righteousness of her beliefs was able to convince the devotees to the new ritual traditions. She introduced these changes cleverly and silently.

At the same time, she was anxious to maintain the saiva traditions to satisfy the orthodox and she did this by permitting the new rituals not in front of the main shrine, but in front of the other shrines. For example, in front of Gaja Laksmi shrine which is housed to the left of the main shrine.

Development of the New Myth

The episode of the new face and the sudden rise of Durga in Jaffna is centred around the myth that the goddess gives husbands to her devotees. It is therefore important to analyse the reality of this myth and its significance in relation to this new face. In sacred rituals and myths, values are portrayed not as subjective human preferences but as the imposed conditions for life implicit in a world with a particular structure (Geertz, 1973:131). In Jaffna, the following are the conditions which paved way to this new face and myth.

1. A new way out

The rituals related to marriage are novel to Jaffna and a long felt way out, specially for the afflicted and affected ones and they form the base of this new myth.

Astrologers in Jaffna also played a vital role in sending people to these temples.

2. *Effective Communication Network*

2.1 Continuous flow of information relating to the success of this myth by Thangammah in temples all over.

2.2 Personal communication among the devotees and most of the new comers to these temples were persuaded by the earlier ones, revealed from my interviews.

2.3 Publicity given by mass media, specially the women magazines from South India carries articles and news bits related to new myths and rituals by modern mythmakers like Durgai Sithar and Poiyamoliyar.

2.4 Newly established satellite temples also plays a role as satellite communication centres.

3. *The New Money Flow*

The new rituals are expensive, but many devotees were able to perform now with the new flow of money from foreign employed kith and kin.

4 *Benefits Experienced.*

4.1 Arranged marriages among the Durga Devotees

The devotees who come to the temple come to know each other and this later developed with the Durga family or a cultic group, as referred by Victor Turner (1974:166). In this regard, I would like to refer how an elderly lady accepted a young girl as a daughter in law who gave up vantage position during a puja.

4.2 Love Opportunities

Young boys and girls meet at these temples, next to tutories. Occasional love affairs develop between them. The cases are rare, but socially accepted now, specially by the girls family. This serves as an escape from the heavy burden of the dowry.

4.3 Group Identification

1. As Nathan Glazer (1955) revealed that the devotees seek a feeling of identity by relating themselves more closely with an established group with similar problems gives an additional psychological strength.

2. More than this, the new rituals have become a show and for the identification of persons with similar afflictions and problems. Infact it is interesting to

note that even marriage brokers visit these temples to look for proper selections.

4.4 A Good Platform

In the temple the frustrated females find a platform to express their feelings and needs to their family members. As Goffman (1959) pointed out, they create a public scene to make public their inner desires. In Jaffna, it has always been a problem to show even to their parents their feelings. To illustrate a point when a female child of marriageable age continues to visit the temple on seven or more consquetive Tuesdays, it will be looked upon as a public pronouncement of her plight. In my interviews this fact was revealed by many concerned parents.

4.5 Reduction of Stress

More than anything, performance of rituals, form as an outlet to reduce the stress they undergo. Many anthropological studies from Durkheim to Obeyesekere (Durkheim, 1912; Crapo, 1987; Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1990) relate this function of manipulating feeling in symbolic forms.

Here, they get the opportunity to take at least a pseudo - bridal role and enjoy the ritual performances dressed in very expensive saries and wearing jewels, flowers etc. In addition by repeatedly observing the rituals they develop a sense of hope for the future.

4.6 Protest in Silence

These practices in a way, can be identifiied as silent protest over the conservative system of marriages in Jaffna, where it is even considered immoral for a young girl to express her urge for marriage, even to her mother.

5. *The reliability and attractions of the Durga Temples.*

The following factors could be attributed:

5.1 The increase in number of devotees who visit these temples even on a normal Tuesday compared to other temples, naturally formed one of the basis for its attraction. Infact, it was one such occasion which gave me an idea to carry out this study, as referred to earlier.

5.2 The sudden development of the physical structure of these temples within a short time, attracted many devotees which made them feel the greatness of the goddess.

5.3 The systematic planning of the temple activities and rituals to schedule which is rather rare in other temples, attracted many even from distant places without experiencing any difficulty.

5.4 The temple management, the priests and the employees have developed a sense of responsibility and they never hesitate to attend to the needs of the devotees even on a busy day. It is worth referring to the point raised elsewhere about the attraction of the priest in these temples.

5.5 Here the temple has developed a social consciousness for the needy. In this regard the Children's Home, maintenance of hospital wards and contributions made to the cardiology unit are some examples.

Generally one questions the temple management about how the income is spent, but here since a large portion is given for social work, no one dares to question, but infact contribute more towards the temple. The temple, therefore receives a large income for development activities as well.

5.6 Again the mere fact that both educationists and the elite of the society accept the changes introduced in the temple and also participate in such activities. Therefore it is not surprising to see the ordinary man taking an active part in such activities.

5.7 Thangammah is looked upon as someone who represents the goddess herself, they refer to her as Ammah. Here, she is a living reflection of mother goddess as referred by Obeyesekere in his study of Pattini Cult (1984). Infact this religious projective system is both a cultural statement and an expression of their intense feeling.

Goddess Durga as a virgin, it is believed will realise the problems of other unmarried females. In this regard the unmarried status of Thangammah is also said to contribute to this.

II. Spread of Satellite Temple

As referred to in the Methodology, it is important to analyse the spread and the variability of the symbolic network of Durga. The factors behind the spread of this cult can be identified as follows:

1. Tellippalai Durga as Forerunner

1.1 Rapid development of Durga cult in Tellippalai, may be considered as the focal point from which other temples came into exitsence. Most of these temples have some form of relationship with Tellippalai Durga.

As mentioned earlier, all these temples came into existence or became reputed only after Tellippalai Durga. It is also evident from my interview with devotees as well as the management personnel that Tellippalai temple was the forerunner.

1.2 The prevailing situation too encouraged these temples, as Tellippalai temple was unapproachable, this gave an additional opportunity for them to restructure and reestablish them.

2. *Availability of Healing Rituals*

Further, the shamanistic - healing rituals which are not available at Tellippalai Durga were introduced in some of these newly established temples.

Each one of these temples has a healing mother who attends to such needs of the devotees. Healing rituals are not new to Jaffna, but Durga has presently gained grounds as a healing goddess and with this healing others came to be associated with each temple.

3. *Viable Earning*

Durga has become a profitable deity as Margaret Taravick Egnore (1984:24) poined out in her study on the healers in Madras. According to her, devotion to the goddess beyond the deeper and psychological factors which gave rise to it, was also a viable way of earning a living.

As a result the healers as well as the temple authorities always maintain their position and the welfare of the temples.

All of them look up to Thangammah as a model. In this regard, Iyappathasan has the personality to develop an institution all by himself, and that too in an urban set up like the city of Colombo. In the case of healers, the observations made by Egnore (1984:24) is worth referring to. She says that,

"the personal qualities of the servants are important to the success of an individual".

This largely depends upon the servant's own persuasive abilities, and this is very true for Durga healers.

Those temples which did not posses the necessary abilities always failed. eg. Siruppiddy Durga Temple.

4. The castism in Jaffna is a hindrance to the uprisal of the depressed caste groups. However, with this new worship and the accompanying rituals, victims are aspiring

to achieve social equality through ritual equality. A similar observation has been made by Fuller (1990:133) in his study of popular Hinduism and society in India. However, this has in no way contributed to bring a change either in their social status or in the growth of their temples.

5. The present crisis in Jaffna increased religiosity, and the people faced unforeseen difficulties and searched for a divine power.

   While in their search, these temples, specially the healing mothers appeared as panacea to their problems. More than just a *tharsan* of gods or goddesses, they were in need of some one's care and counselling. As there needs are catered to by these temples, they became popular.

III. On Feminist Perspective

This study of goddess Durga raises a few important questions about the women's role in religious changes, and for the scholarly development of women studies. Presently, the feminist movements are regarded as a major contributory factor in the revitalization of goddess worship and for this as a topic of inquiry among popular writers and scholars of different disciplines (Preston, 1982). According to them goddess worship and imagery are considered to be the focus of a new power for women rooted in the women's liberation movement and grounded in a new symbol system.

Examining the new face of Durga in this feminist perspective, the following facts emerges out to the surface;

1. Durga, previously an unpopular goddess worshipped for ony 3 days a year as a warrior goddess, now is revitalized and has become an important deity not only in Jaffna but in all places where Hindus live.

2. Durga is seen here as a feminine goddess propitiated and maintained by a predominantly feminine population. She in her new form, is said to solve one of the major problems confronted by women, namely marriage.

3. The ritual importance for females which was not experienced in Jaffna earlier, is now available in these centres of Durga. The women for example have gained the right to handle to draw the *Ther*, an act hitherto enjoyed only by the males.

4. As illustrated earlier, many women healers who identify them as the servant or the representative of Durga and their possessed stage was very much accepted by Jaffna society.

5. More than these a lady for the first time is accepted as the president of the Board of Management in an agamic temple with its rich orthodox saivite tradition and male chauvinsim.

When the above facts are considered, it would appear that the revitalization of this goddess has paved the path for women liberation through this new wave of religiosity. But in reality, one could see a negative effect of the whole as far as the women are concerned.

1. As Dimoak (1989: 96-102) point out based on his study on the Tantic Vaishnava - Sahajaya movement in Bengal, women can enjoy usually a high status at least in the religious context, perhaps this is very true for the women of Jaffna as well.

   Ideologically, these new rituals as well as the religious importance of women only reinforce the traditional perception of society, specially the cultural roles prescribed for Tamil women like *housewifery*, motherhood, *Sumangali* status etc. Ann (1994) refers to the plight of women and particularly that of unmarried women as follows, those who do not fulfil their prescribed social roles are seen to be lacking in their lives, to be in some way or other incomplete and to have failed to fulfil their biological destiny and sociological meaning, and unmarried daughters are made to feel that they are a family burden and a social embarrassment. Therefore, the state of being unmarried is hated by women since it condemns them to a permanent condition of despair and unhappiness. This is the major pushing factor that drives the women towards Durga, as evident from the present study.

   But the present rituals and ritual involvement are only making the women more and more dependent on the male and reinforces the traditional norms of inequality of sex amongst the Tamils.

2. Women possession episodes are also as Fuller (1990:233) pointed out culturally tolerated opportunities and we were able to see that though the housewife is possessed, she has never failed in her duty as a wife and mother. As far as this aspect is concerned, she played her subordinate role to Tamil tradition. Apart from this, the acceptance is due to the good earning and the recognition given to their husbands as priests is worth mentioning here.

3. As far as Thangammah is concerned, her acceptance as the president is an unique one. Infact, this is due to her own charismatic qualities, her dedication and administrative ability.

However, she too faced opposition from the male chauvinists (Chandradeepam, 1978) but her dedication and her honest contribution to the temple and society were very much needed and as a result, all criticism levelled against her did not last long.

But, Thangammah as a victim of the Socio-cultural system of Jaffna remained a spinster, and was in a position to understand the emotional problems of women. But her role always remained embedded within the cultural norms. Infact, her ideology was reflected in one of her recent articles;

As far as the women are concerned qualities like *darman*, *satyam*, purity, patience, sympathy, chastity, self confidence and self control give pride to a woman.

A woman must be a source of pride to her own family and to her husband's family, and respect the husband as the god and praise him. These are duties of a good woman. (Appacuddy, 1996: 156)

Strictly speaking the reality, this revitalization of the goddess is thought to bring women into the forefront and live in equal terms with men, but instead it has only reinforced the traditional ideas and brought the women only to squat on the ritual platform.

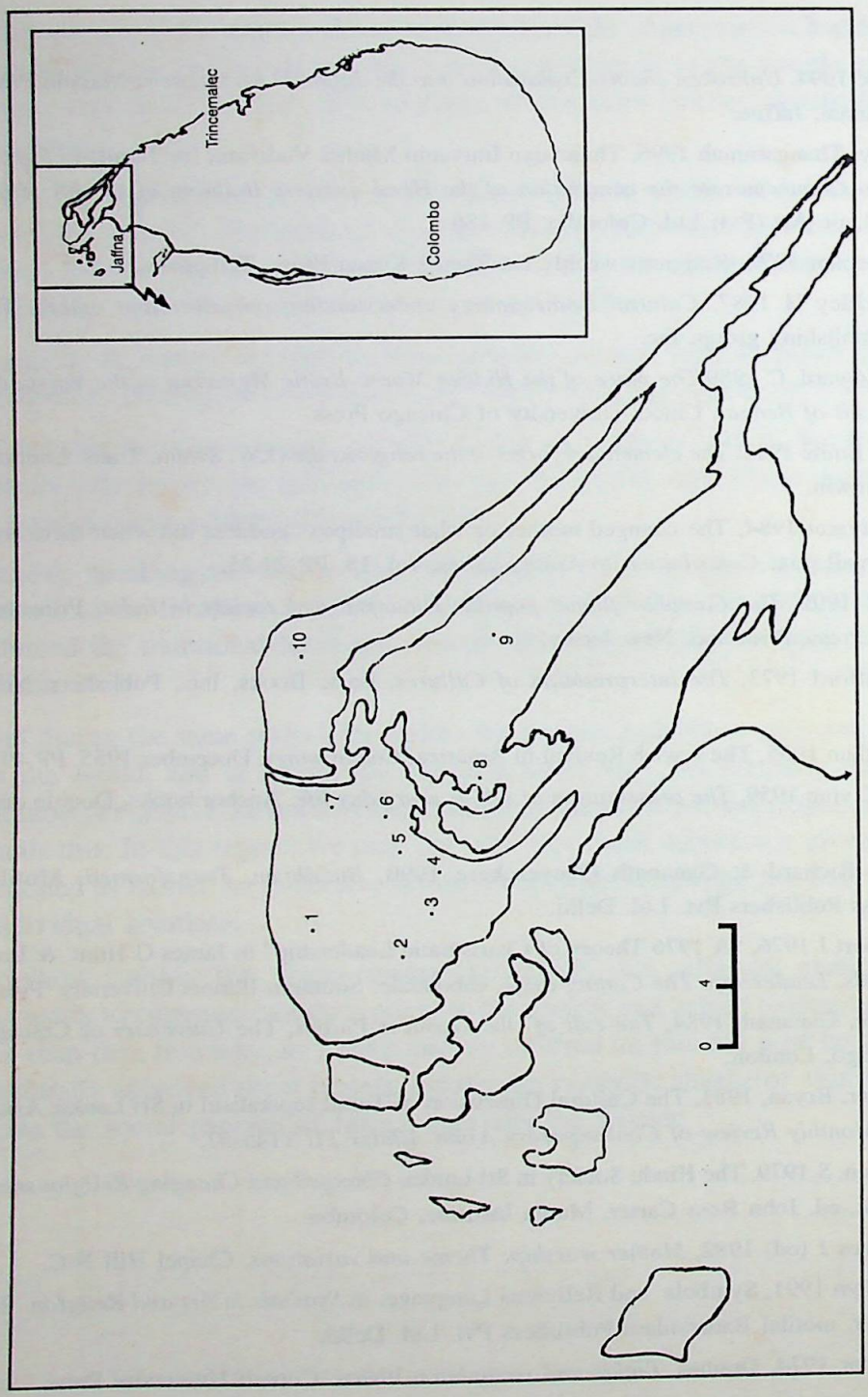
But during the same period, the voices for women equality is very much heard all over the world, and in Jaffna too but in a small way. As correctly identified by Pfaffenberger (1981), Jaffna's extreme cultural conservatism has played a small role towards this. In this regard, we may say that this ritual importance given to women functioned as barrier for collective action towards social change and only paved way to individual solutions.

Anyhow, within this socio-cultural boundary, this religious change gave an opportunity to communicate their plight to the society and helped to ease their tension. More than this, in a way, as I have already referred to, this has now become a form of culturally approved silent protest; Finally the symbolic change of this deity clearly reflects the social persona of Jaffna, specially the women.

References

1. Ann, Adele 1994, *Unbroken chains-Exploration into the Jaffna Dowry system*; Malathi Press, Vannar Pannai, Jaffna.
2. Appacuddy, Thangammah 1996, Thaimaiye Iraivanin Muthal Vadivam, (in Tamil)-in *Special souvenir to Commemorate the completion of the Head quarters Building of the All Hindu congress*, Unie Art (Pvt) Ltd, Colombo. PP 186.
3. Chandradeepam 1978, Religious weekly (in Tamil) Kugan Press, Tellippalai.
4. Carpo, Richley H 1987, *Cultural Anthropology understanding ourselves and others*, The Dushkin Publishing group, Inc.
5. Dimock, Edward, C 1989,*The place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaisnava-Sahajaya cult of Bengal*, Chico: University of Chicago Press.
6. Durkheim, Emile 1912, *The elementary forms of the religious life* (J.W. Swain, Trans. London: Allen & Unwin.
7. Egnor, Margaret 1984, The changed mother or what smallpox goddess did when there was no more small pox, *Contribution to Asian studies*, vol. 18, PP 24-25.
8. Fuller, C J 1992, *The Camphor flame: popular Hinduism and society in India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
9. Geertz, Clifford 1973, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York.
10. Glazer, Nathan 1955, The Jewish Revival in America, *Commentary*, December 1955, PP 493.
11. Goffman, Ervine 1959, *The presentation of self in every day life*, Anchor books, Double day, New York.
12. Gombrich, Richard & Gananath Obeyesekere 1990, *Buddhism, Transformed*, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Delhi.
13. House, Robert J 1976, "A 1976 Theory of Charismatic Leadership" in James G Hunt & Lars L Larson, eds. *Leadership: The Cutting Edge*, cabondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
14. Obeyesekere, Gananath 1984, *The cult of the Goddess Pattini*, The *University* of Chicago Press, Chicago, London.
15. Pfaffenberger, Bryan, 1981, The Cultural Dimension of Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka, *Asian Survey: A Monthly Review of Contemporary Asian Affairs* 21: 1145-57.
16. Pathmanathan, S 1979, The Hindu Society in Sri Lanka, *Changed and Changing Religiousness in Sri Lanka*, ed. John Ross Carter, Marga Institute, Colombo.
17. Priston, James J (ed) 1982, *Mother worship: Theme and variations*, Chapel Hill N.C.
18. Richards, Glyn 1991, Symbols and Religious Language, in *Symbols in Art and Religion*. Ed. Karel werner, motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Delhi.
19. Turner, Victor 1974, Dramas, *Fields and metaphors*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Map 2.1 : Jaffna Peninsula - Main Temple & Satellite Temples



1. Tellippalai 2. Kaddudai 3. Kokkuvil 4. Nayanmarkaddu 5. Kopay
6. Siruppiddy 7. Achchuveli 8. Thalayady 9. Mirusuvil 10. Alvai

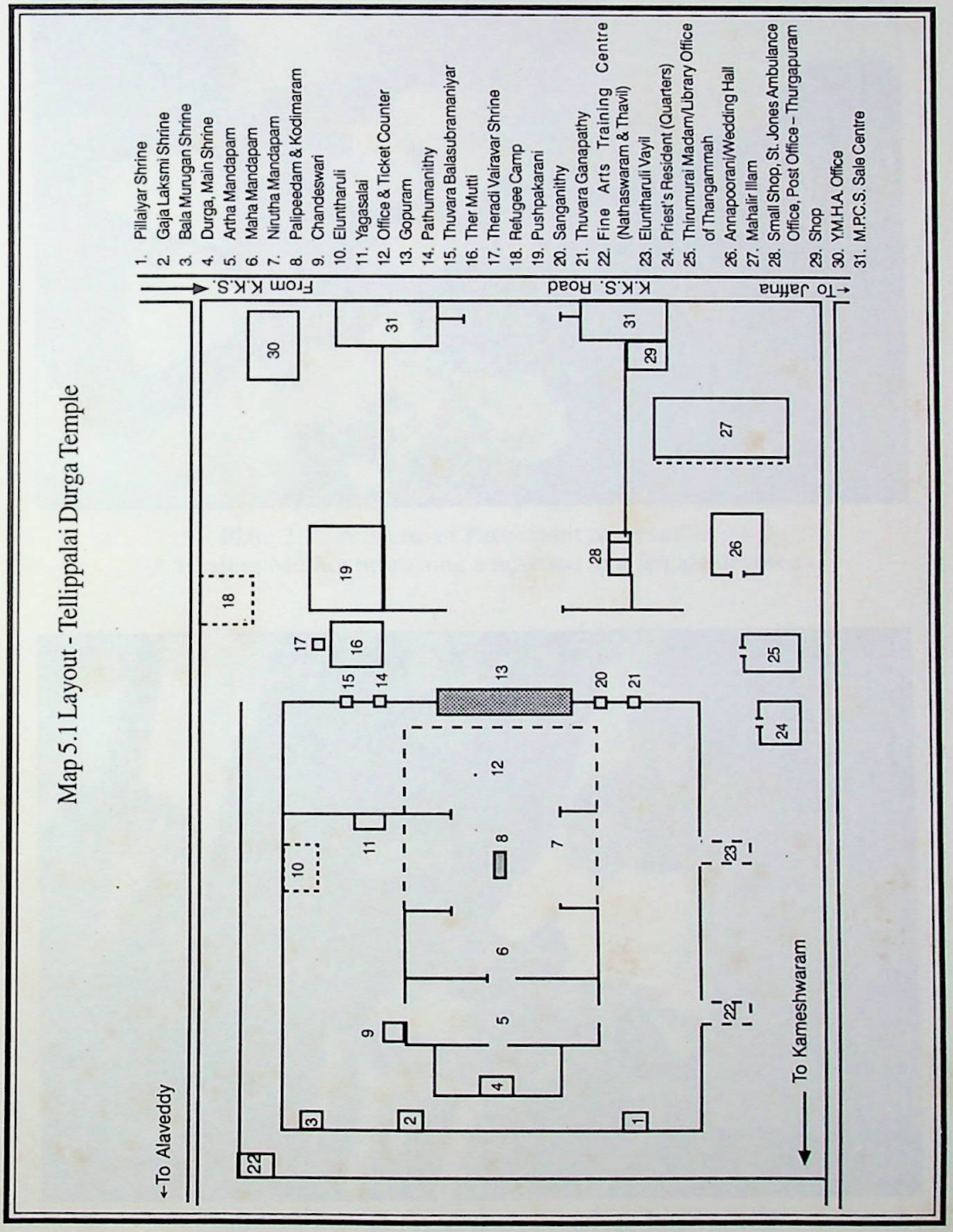

Map 5.1 Layout - Tellippalai Durga Temple
1. Pillaiyar Shrine
2. Gaja Laksmi Shrine
3. Bala Murugan Shrine
4. Durga, Main Shrine
5. Artha Mandapam
6. Maha Mandapam
7. Nirutha Mandapam
8. Palipeedam & Kodimaram
9. Chandeswari
10. Eluntharuli
11. Yagasalai
12. Office & Ticket Counter
13. Gopuram
14. Pathumanithy
15. Thuvara Balasubramaniyar
16. Ther Mutti
17. Theradi Vairavar Shrine
18. Refugee Camp
19. Pushpakarani
20. Sanganithy
21. Thuvara Ganapathy
22. Fine Arts Training Centre (Nathaswaram & Thavil)
23. Eluntharuli Vayil
24. Priest's Resident (Quarters)
25. Thirumurai Madam/Library Office of Thangammah
26. Annapoorani/Wedding Hall
27. Mahalir Illam
28. Small Shop, St. Jones Ambulance Office, Post Office – Thurgapuram
29. Shop
30. Y.M.H.A. Office
31. M.P.C.S. Sale Centre
From K.K.S.
K.K.S. Road
To Jaffna
←To Alaveddy
To Kameshwaram

Plate 2.1 : A Scene of Participant observation :
A Healing Mother promising a husband to a female devotee

Plate 2.2 : Researcher as non-participant Interviewer

Plate 4.1 : Traditional role of Durga as Mahisasura Marthani-A Wall Painting

Plate 4.2 : Navaratri, Growing *Navathaniam* - tradition perpetuated to bring fertility, in a devotee's home.

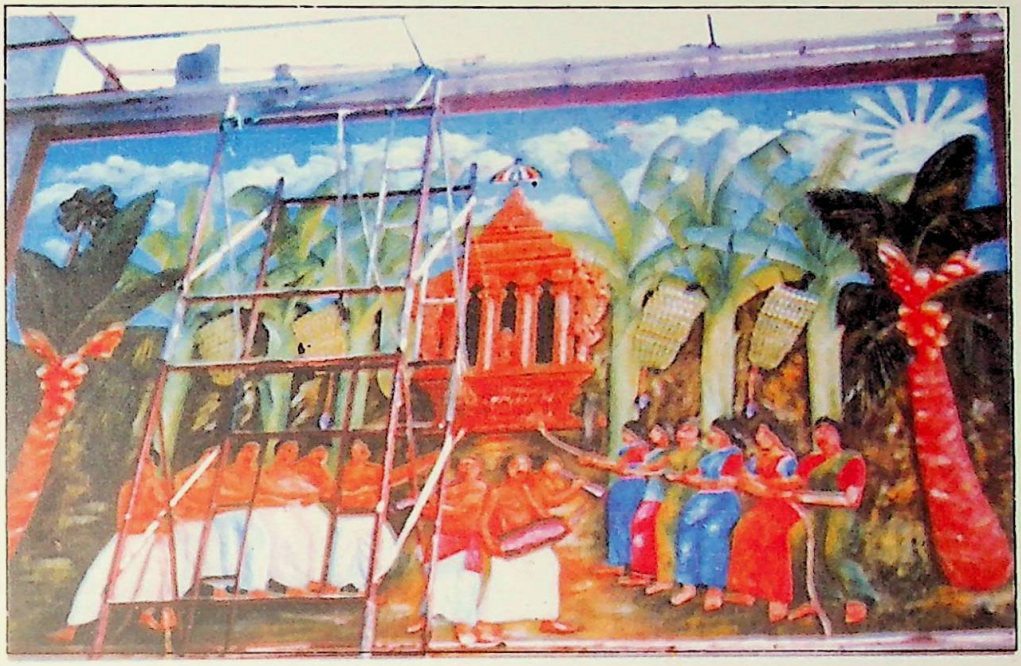


Plate 4.3 : Ritual equality amongst the sexes - A Wall Painting

Plate 5.1 :
Rajakopuram of Tellippalai Durga facing east

Plate 5.2 :
Eluntharuli Durga with
new satvic form

Plate 5.3 :
Durga Thuranthari
Thangammah honoured
with Doctorate degree.

Plate 5.4 : Female devotee - the target group of Dr. Thangammah

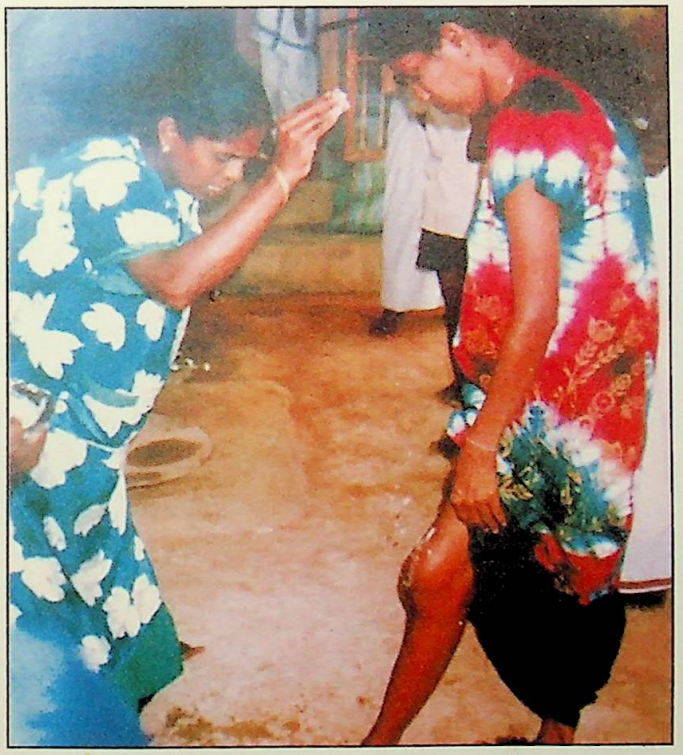


Plate 5.5 :
Act of healing, a badly affected foot

Plate 5.6 : Blessed with a child, *nerti* fulfilled by offering the palm tree to healing mother.

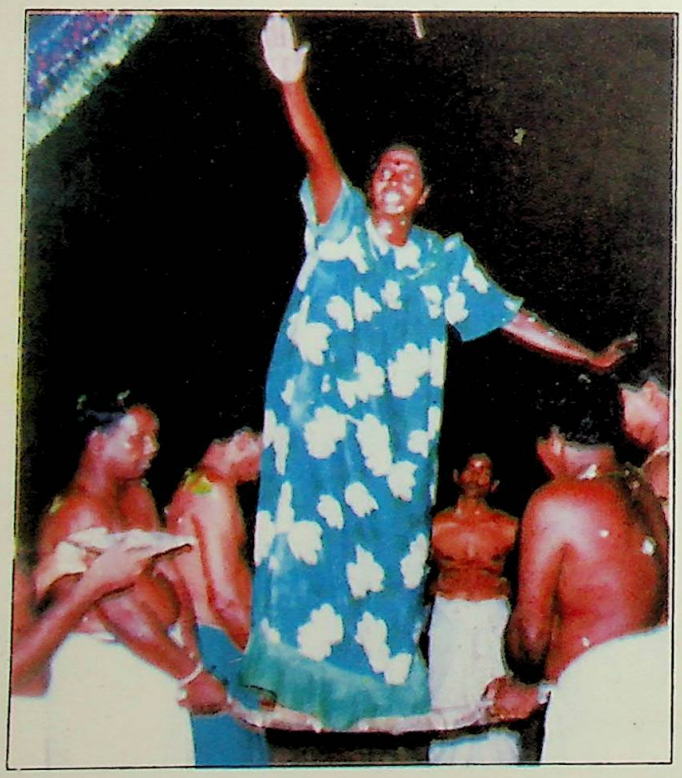


Plate 5.7 : Manonmanie on the sword carried by devotees

Plate 5.8 : Jeya, the healing mother

Plate 5.9 : Healing a possessed lady

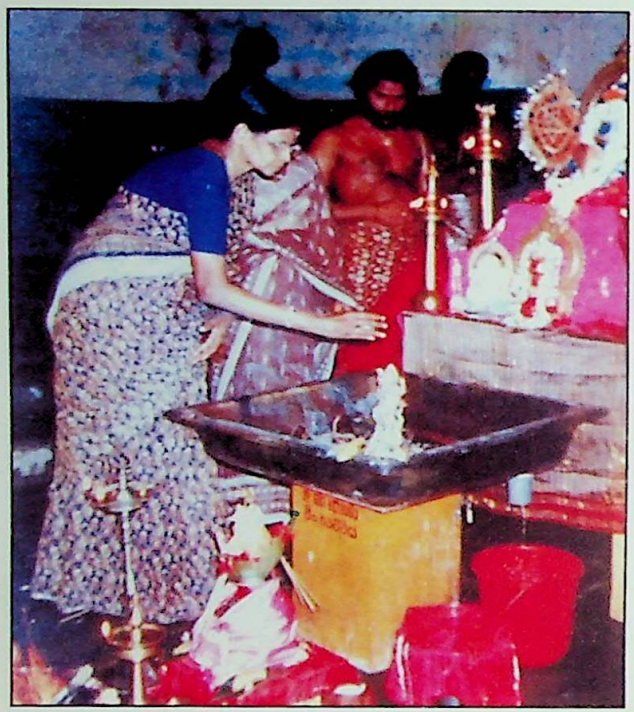


Plate 5.10 :
Personal Annoiting at Ragukalan Colombo part time Durga temple.

18799

Plate 5.11 :
Trincomalee Durga-Guardian of Peace and Harmony